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Sponsorship in Al-Anon Family Groups: A Narrative Study

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SPONSORSHIP IN AL-ANON FAMILY GROUPS: A NARRATIVE STUDY

HEIDI HIATT

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program

of Antioch University

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

July, 2017

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled:

SPONSORSHIP IN AL-ANON: A NARRATIVE STUDY

prepared by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the members of Al-Anon Family Groups. My life has been profoundly changed for the better because of you. Thank you.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge about the relationship between sponsor and sponsee in Al-Anon Family Groups from the perspective of sponsors and sponsees in Al-Anon. The main question guiding my research is: What is the nature and quality of the sponsorship relationship as perceived by sponsors and sponsees? Nineteen men and women were interviewed and shared stories of their experience of being a sponsor and a sponsee in the Al-Anon program. I utilized a holistic-content approach to analyze the data from the interviews. To help situate the findings in current literature a discussion of sponsorship in Alcoholics Anonymous, therapy, mentoring, and other helping groups is provided. The findings suggest that there are similarities between Al-Anon sponsorship and mentoring in that both relationships progress through stages of development. The findings suggest that boundaries are an important aspect of Al-Anon that helps its members to healthily detach from other people. Al-Anon members are motivated to help based on the culture of helping found in the program as seen through its service structure and sponsorship. The leadership that Al-Anon sponsors provide finds connections with several leadership theories including, transformational, servant, relational, and authentic leadership. The electronic version of this dissertation is at AURA: Antioch University and Repository Archive, <https://aura.antioch.edu/> and Ohio Link ETD Center, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu>

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Introduction

The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems. We believe alcoholism is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery. Al-Anon is not allied with any sect, denomination, political entity, organization, or institution; does not engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. There are no dues for membership. Al-Anon is self-supporting through its own voluntary contributions. Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic. (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., 2013, p. 12)

Mutual aid or self-help groups are prevalent in the United States and around the world.

Self-help groups are groups of people who provide mutual help to each other. Usually these groups center on a common problem like alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, overeating, or cancer. There are also support groups that aid families and friends of people who are affected by any of these issues. These support groups are unique from other forms of help because they are run completely by group members. There are no professionals, and each member is asked to participate in the running of their group. They set up chairs, read from the book format, make coffee, clean up and much more. The members in the group all have equal status and take turns running the meetings. Members learn from each other by listening to each other share their story with the common issue. There is a wide range of services that researchers include in the words, self-help, mutual aid, peer support, and support groups. For this study when any of these words are used, I am referring to a group of individuals, who share a common problem, and come together for mutual aid without a professional facilitator. The oldest and most widely known self-help group is Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.). Many of these groups encourage the development of helping relationships between two members. In both A.A. and its sister organization Al-Anon, these relationships are called “sponsorship.” The focus of this research

will be on participants' experiences in the sponsorship relationship. However, first the history, principles, and structure of A.A. will be discussed.

History of Support Groups

A.A. began in 1935 in Akron, Ohio, when Bill Wilson, an alcoholic, shared his story of recovery with Dr. Bob Smith, another alcoholic struggling to find sobriety. Prior to this meeting, both Bill and Dr. Bob (as they are commonly referred to in A.A.) had had experiences with the Oxford Group, a Christian evangelical movement. According to Bill W., "the early A.A. got its ideas of self-examination, acknowledgement of character defects, restitution for harm done, working with others straight from the Oxford Group" (Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing, Inc., 1986, p. 39). When first sober, Bill attended meetings with the Oxford Group. The meetings and conversations with Sam Shoemaker, the leader of the Oxford Groups, taught Bill about prayer (Thomsen, 1975, p. 229). He learned that prayer was a way of discovering the will of God. To hear the will of God he had to listen in prayer. The Layman With the Notebook (1933) wrote that the Oxford Groups is centered on four points, which allow them to live a godly life: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love (p. 8) and they advocate four practical spiritual activities:

1. The Sharing of our sins and temptations with another Christian life given to God, and to use Sharing as Witness to help others, still unchanged, to recognize and acknowledge their sins.
2. Surrender of our life, past, present, and future, into God's keeping and direction.
3. Restitution to all whom we have wronged directly or indirectly.

4. Listening to, accepting, relying on God's Guidance and carrying it out in everything we do or say, great or small (p. 9).

Bill armed with the Oxford Group's points and spiritual activities went out and tried to help drunks. He did not have much success. He had a conversation with Dr. Silkworth who told him to stop preaching to the drunks and to tell them his own story (Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing, Inc., 1986, p. 68).

When Bill met Dr. Bob, he shared with him how he had remained sober—by telling his story to other drunks and trying to help them to find their own recovery. It is said that soon after Dr. Bob met Bill, and discovered that recovery was possible and alcoholism was a disease, he too became sober. The two began to reach out to others suffering from alcoholism and formed the first Alcoholics Anonymous group. By 1939, there were three groups, 100 sober alcoholics, and the A.A. textbook, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, had been published. This book, also referred to as *The Big Book*, outlined the Twelve Steps (see Appendix A) of recovery which some say are based on the spiritual foundations of the Oxford Group.

The first members of A.A. were mostly men. As they met in living rooms in Ohio and New York, their wives, children, and other close family members would gather in the kitchen or other rooms of the house. They shared stories and talked about what was happening in their homes. These gatherings helped them see that they were not alone in their predicament. They began to understand that others were experiencing the same type of behaviors from their loved ones and from themselves. Sharing seemed to help them recover from the debilitating effects of living with alcoholism.

It is difficult to determine how effective A.A. is or for that matter how many people attend its meetings. Tradition 12 of A.A. states, “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities” (See Appendix B). A.A. is an anonymous fellowship and therefore its numbers cannot be known. However, given the longevity of the program, its worldwide presence, and the many other self-help organizations that model the principles of A.A., it could be concluded that it is an effective form of help for some people.

The twelve steps of A.A. became the foundation of many other Twelve Step programs. These programs cover different types of addictions, psychiatric conditions, and families and parents who are connected with these issues (Stoddart, 2011).

There is a common thread among most of these 12 Step programs. Most of them center on habitual or compulsive behaviors. The most common of which is addiction. However there is a small group of programs listed that are for the families: Al-Anon/Alateen, Adult Children of Alcoholics, Nar-Anon, Families Anonymous, Parents Anonymous, Co-Anon, and Co-Dependents Anonymous. These programs are designed for anyone who is affected by the compulsion of a loved one. For members of these programs, their issue is not a neurological addiction. Their obsession is the person who suffers from an addiction. Their enablement and patterns of behaviors have emerged from being a part of the addict’s system. They attend support groups to learn how to stop enabling and obsessing over the addict’s behavior, and to focus on themselves.

The Beginning of Al-Anon

A.A. in the beginning was for the whole family. The meetings were originally held mostly in homes and spouses, parents, and children would attend too (Wilson, 1979). Many of the wives tried to live the principles of the program as well. The pioneer of Al-Anon, Annie S., Dr. Bob's wife, opened her home to wives and families of alcoholics. Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. (n.d.b), explained:

As Bill W. and Dr. Bob met and began to build a foundation for recovering alcoholics, it was Annie S., wife of Dr. Bob, who comforted the grief-stricken wife when she said, "Come in my dear, you're with friends now—friends who understand." Perhaps Annie was given the first insight into the significance of the Twelve Steps of AA as a way of life for the family member as well. (para. 1)

In 1936 in Ohio, Annie S. began a meeting for the families of alcoholics to have a place to talk with other families living with the same issues (Al-Anon Information Services, n.d.).

Later when the first A.A. clubhouse was built in 1940 the A.A. members felt they needed meetings that were reserved for alcoholics only. While these meetings took place, the wives congregated in a room upstairs and played bridge, gossiped, and discussed their own problems (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., n.d.b). In 1950 after Bill had returned home from traveling and speaking around the country, he told his wife, Lois, that many family groups had sprung up around the country and that she should open up an office to provide service for them (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., n.d.b). Lois with the help of Anne B., a good friend of the family, sought to organize the women (and other family members) into a support group of their own. Lois realized she had seen improvements in Bill but she was still struggling with the lingering effects of Bill's alcoholism on the family. In 1951, at the end of the A.A. General Service Conference, she brought the delegates' wives and other family groups' members to her

home and together they discussed formalizing the family groups. She and Anne wrote letters to each of the family groups they knew had been meeting regularly and non-alcoholic individuals who had asked A.A. for help and gave them a petition to discover whether they would like to form a group (see Appendix C). They received 47 responses from the family groups. These groups officially became the Al-Anon Family Groups.

The Al-Anon program is based on the Twelve Steps of A.A. In fact, Lois saw fit to only change one word in the Steps. In Step 12, “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs” (see Appendix D). The word “alcoholics” was changed to “others” in the Al-Anon Twelve Steps.

The Al-Anon Legacies: the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service, are the building blocks of the Al-Anon program (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., 2013, p. 13). Each of these works together to assure the continuity and structure of the program. Briefly stated, the Steps focus on the individual and his or her own recovery; the Traditions focus on the functioning of the group or are a guide for individuals working within a group; and the Concepts guide the structure of Al-Anon as a whole. By working the Steps, each member strives to connect with a higher power, a source of comfort and strength, and to grow spiritually. The Traditions give ultimate authority of each group to make their own decisions as long as the decisions they make do not affect (positively or negatively) Al-Anon as a whole. In other words the actions of a group or individual Al-Anon member cannot alter Al-Anon or the perception of Al-Anon in any way. The Concepts regulate the upper leadership of Al-Anon. The vast majority

of positions within Al-Anon are volunteers and members of the Al-Anon program. There are some paid positions within the area and national offices.

Al-Anon Family Groups

As it says in the preamble to the twelve steps, the Al-Anon Family Groups (Al-Anon or AFG) has one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. In other AFG literature, “families” is broadened to anyone who feels their life has been affected by someone else’s drinking. This could be a parent, spouse, child, friend, co-worker, etc. Al-Anon is a support group where men, women, and children come together to receive and give mutual aid. They do this by sharing their stories in a group setting. AFG meetings can be found in all 50 states, in most of the provinces and territories of Canada, and at least 55 other countries (as listed on <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/international-meetings>). Like A.A., Al-Anon has the same Tradition 12 that protects each member’s anonymity. Because of this, it is not possible to determine how many members it has.

While there are no dues or membership, people who attend Al-Anon meetings are called members. Members do not formally join the Al-Anon program. Participation is at will and members are free to go to as many meetings as they like or none. If a meeting is listed as “open” in the local AFG directory, a meeting will take place and anyone is free to attend. If the meeting is listed as “closed,” it means that it is only available to people who are interested in Al-Anon for their own recovery. Visitors are not allowed. The majority of meetings are open. The members of the Al-Anon fellowship are encouraged to share their experience, strength, and hope of the Al-Anon program. Generally each person shares what it was like before coming into the program, what happened that made them want to come to the program, and what it is like now since

attending meetings. They share what they have learned, and how they will continue to use the tools of the program in the future. By sharing in this way, the members put the focus on their own lives and experiences instead of those of the alcoholic. Most who come to Al-Anon have had an unhealthy obsession with the alcoholic(s) in their lives. They spend so much of their time worrying about the alcoholic and trying to control her drinking that they lose perspective on their own lives. In the Al-Anon program, they are encouraged to focus on themselves and to become spiritually, emotionally, and physically healthier.

Structure of Al-Anon. Al-Anon is a worldwide fellowship. There are more than 29,000 groups all over the world. Each group shares a format and structure based on the Twelve Steps and Twelve traditions of A.A. Most countries have one service office. Some have more than one. AFG in the United States is broken into states, then areas, then into districts, and finally to groups. Each group has a representative (GR) that attends group representative meetings. These meetings elect a district representative (DR) that attends area meetings. The area meetings elect a delegate to represent the area in national and international meetings and conferences. In addition to the group, district, and area is the World Service Office (WSO). The WSO provides services worldwide. They develop and distribute Al-Anon literature and are the governing body of AFG.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship is one component of Al-Anon. “Sponsorship is a friendship made up of two members learning from one another, . . . two people learning a new way to live-one day at a time” (Al-Anon Family Groups, 1992, p. 226). Most often a sponsor is a member of Al-Anon who has more experience than the sponsee. Sometimes a sponsee will have more time in the program than the sponsor. AFG members are encouraged to find a sponsor who will help them

work the program: “to look for someone who has what you want.” Newcomers often choose to work with someone who has been welcoming to them at meetings. They approach a person and ask if that person is willing to sponsor them. Some people will provide an answer immediately. Others will ask the person to meet with them first to discuss their hope for the relationship. Still others will require their new sponsees to call them every day for 30 days. Everyone does the sponsor/sponsee relationship differently. Sometimes members say no to being a sponsor. Individuals may decline to become the person’s sponsor for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they do not feel they are a good match or they are already overcommitted in one or more areas of their lives. Regardless of their reason, it is an acceptable part of the process to decline an invitation to be a sponsor. Although sponsorship is not mandatory to the program it is highly encouraged because it can be such a meaningful and transformational relationship.

Each sponsorship relationship is unique. There is no manual to train either member of the partnership in how to structure, engage, or maintain the relationship. The single guiding purpose is to provide support for the sponsee to grow and develop free from focusing their energy on the addict’s recovery or on-going addiction. There is no requirement that both members of the relationship attend the same Al-Anon meeting, although it is not prohibited. The sponsor is usually someone who has more experience with the Al-Anon program than the sponsee but he is not an expert. He is not a teacher, teaching the sponsee, but rather a friend and guide that also works the Al-Anon program with his own sponsor. The sponsorship relationship is meant to promote a deep level of trust where difficult memories and emotions can be shared. In spite of the intimacy of the encounters often members don’t even know each other’s last names, the job they hold, or where they live. Because of the anonymity of the program and the desire to keep

the focus on the program of Al-Anon, members are suggested to leave issues, like their jobs and affiliations, outside the relationship. Sponsors also share their experience. They discuss their life challenges and the tools of the program that have worked for them. The sponsorship relationship has flourished in Al-Anon and it might be concluded that the anonymity, trust and longevity of this relationship of recovery is effective for many Al-Anon members. Yet, there have been no studies or detailed reports of the nature, characteristics and quality of the Al-Anon sponsorship relationship.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge about the relationship between sponsor and sponsee in Al-Anon. Given its importance and that we know so little about sponsorship in Al-Anon, I am choosing to use narrative inquiry methodology to capture the nuances of the relationship in story. By interviewing sponsors and sponsees, I hope to discover through story the meaning the sponsorship relationship has to them. The main question guiding my research is: What is the nature and quality of the sponsorship relationship as perceived by sponsors and sponsees? Further guiding questions are: What are the perceived benefits and challenges of sponsorship? In what ways does sponsorship contribute to or inhibit the recovery of Al-Anon members? As the interviewing process evolves additional questions as relevant to the participants' experiences will emerge.

Rationale

Why is this study needed? The literature on sponsorship in Al-Anon is scant. After an exhaustive search, only the following three articles were found about Al-Anon that mentioned sponsorship (i.e., Kuuluvainen & Isotalus, 2014; Timko et al., 2013; Timko, Young, & Moos,

2012;). Timko, Young, & Moos (2012) included the following explanation of sponsorship in Al-Anon:

A sponsor is an Al-Anon member who provides personal support to another individual, whether the sponsee is new or has been in Al-Anon for a longer period of time. Sponsors share their experience, strength, and hope, explain the Al-Anon program, guide sponsees in using tools of the program, and help sponsees work and apply the 12 steps. (p. 282)

Kuuluvainen and Isotalus (2014) and Timko et al., (2013) only mentioned that members may obtain a sponsor but no further information on the relationship was reported. Sponsorship is an important part of Al-Anon members' recovery. Anecdotally, the relationship that sponsees have with sponsors and sponsors with sponsees have been life changing for many. Because there is so little information about sponsorship in Al-Anon, I will explore an analogous relationship, mentorship, to provide a framework from which to view sponsorship in Al-Anon. The comparison between the mentoring relationship and the sponsorship relationship will be explored in chapter two.

This study would be a beginning step in understanding the power and challenge of the Al-Anon relationship for its partners.

Positionality of the Researcher

So why do I want to do this project? The Al-Anon program has been life changing for me. I started the program as a last ditch effort. I had tried therapy, was involved in a church and other activities but I was depressed and miserable. I could not figure out what was wrong with me or how to make myself better. A friend of a friend suggested I try an Al-Anon meeting and I finally gave it a try. My life did not change right away, but I knew within a few meetings that I had found a place that could help me. To help me feel more involved in the program, I quickly became of service. To be of service means to become involved and help sustain the meeting.

This could be setting up chairs, making coffee, leading meeting, and more. In one meeting I became the secretary and in another the Group Representative (GR) for one term (three years). As such, I represented my home group at district meetings. In my five years since joining Al-Anon I have found many ways to be of service to the groups I regularly attend. I have sold Al-Anon literature, served cake at birthday meetings, welcomed newcomers, and led meetings. I also become involved in local conferences and conventions of Al-Anon and Alcoholics Anonymous. Being of service and attending meetings helped me tremendously, but working the steps and being in an intimate relationship with my sponsor is what has helped me the most.

Working with my sponsor, I learned to trust and love her and that helped me to trust and love myself and other people. I connected with her, which led me to connect more to the other people in the program. I noticed others change in the program once they began to work with sponsors and it got me thinking about the sponsor/sponsee relationship. I know of no other relationship like it and I am amazed by its simplicity and its power to change lives.

Al-Anon has been a powerful experience for me. I am aware that my appreciation for the program may color my view of it. I have seen many people come in as newcomers, stay for a few meetings, and then never come back. I know some people struggle with the steps or with working a sponsor or other aspects of the program. I know that it is not the right answer for everyone. By listening to the stories of Al-Anon members, I hope to portray a wide variety of perspectives of the program. I have a deep affection for Al-Anon and there is a possibility that my story and good experiences in the program will overshadow the stories I hear. Thus it is important that I listen carefully to all stories as they are portrayed, and not assume that all sponsor relationships are positive or fulfilling. Narrative inquiry, as a constructivist

methodology, will provide a space for my reflexive understanding of the material from participants and, in this way, acknowledge my own presence in the interpretation of the stories offered by participants. The reporting of my co-construction of meaning with the participant's story will be an important aspect of creating trustworthiness in the final interpretation.

For me this study is personal and I want more people to know about the program of Al-Anon. I am not sure what completing this research will do for me professionally. Personally, I am hoping it will help spread the word about Al-Anon to more people, explain what a powerful relationship sponsorship can be, and help me be a better sponsor. By interviewing sponsors and sponsees, I hope to discover through story the meaning the sponsorship relationship has to them.

Contribution of This Study to Leading Change

Given that there is so little research on the sponsorship relationship, it is possible that my research will shed light on the benefits and challenges it brings to the individuals in the relationship. Knowing this may further influence understanding of successful sponsorship relationships. It may better explain sponsorship in Al-Anon, which could allow sponsors and sponsees to better understand their roles and the expectations within the relationship. At this point, much is unknown. Understanding this relationship may help us better understand relationships in Twelve Step programs.

Organization of the Dissertation

In the first chapter I provided an overview of the proposed study. Throughout this process, I am seeking to understand more about the relationship between sponsor and sponsee in Al-Anon and to understand how it works. This study though personal for me may provide

foundational knowledge to others about sponsorship in Al-Anon which could be used as background knowledge for therapists and other Al-Anon members.

In chapter two I provide an overview of the research that relates to AFG and sponsorship. I explore the literature on family systems, addiction, and mentoring to provide a framework of discussion on Al-Anon. In chapter three I examine the epistemology of narrative research and describe my method of study. In this chapter a discussion of ethical considerations and limitations of the study is also be included. In chapter four, I discuss the findings of the study. In the fifth chapter there is a discussion of the implications of practice, limitations, and scope of the study. In addition, I discuss ideas of future areas of research related to this study. The reflexive part of the work appears in chapter five.

Critical Review of Relevant Theory, Research, and Practice

In this chapter literature relevant to the study of sponsorship in Al-Anon will be discussed. To date, there is very little literature that discusses Al-Anon sponsorship. Because of the gap in the literature, an exploration of other helping relationships is necessary to create a way to better understand and view sponsorship. The related literature has become the scaffolding of the study.

First there will be a discussion of family systems to give background of the problems alcoholism can cause within families. Second, the discussion will move into treatments and the ways in which people seek help. This leads naturally into support groups, which are examined in depth. Support groups are an important area to study because Al-Anon is a support group and at its meetings are where most members find a sponsor. A sponsor does not have to belong to the same group but sponsors do encourage their sponsees to attend meetings. Sponsorship is one part of the Al-Anon group support program, thus the literature on self-help groups is a significant area of this review. Last, the literature on mentorship is reexamined and explored in depth because this relationship is most similar to sponsorship in Al-Anon. The mentoring literature was studied and themes emerged. These themes are then used to discuss similar aspects of sponsorship.

Family Systems

Historically alcoholism was considered an individual's problem. It is only fairly recently that alcoholism has come to be considered a disease in which the whole family is affected (Chan, 2003). Alcoholism also affects friends, co-workers, and anyone else who has consistent close contact with an alcoholic. For purposes of this study, anyone that cares about the drinker deeply

enough that she is changed by it is included in the use of the word family. Alcoholic families are more dysfunctional than normal families (Rotunda, Scherer, & Imm, 1995) because the presence of alcohol can cause instability in the home, violence, emotional distress, disruption of routines, strained relationships, and related behaviors. To better understand why alcoholism has different effects on family members and individuals, it is important to understand that a family is a system.

Merriam-Webster defines a system as “a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole” (System, n.d.). Any one part of the system can impact the whole system. A family system then would be people who interact together regularly or interdependently and are part of the same family. Lander, Howsare, and Byrne (2013) found that the premise of family systems theory is that “the individual cannot be fully understood or successfully treated without first understanding how that individual functions in his or her family system” (p. 3). Studying family systems is looking at the whole family instead of looking at each individual part or looking at the whole to understand the parts (Bavelas & Segal, 1982). Each person in a family can affect the other members positively and negatively. The family is a fluid unit that constantly tries to stabilize itself by adapting to stress, reacting, and reorganizing the system (Saatcioglu, Erim, & Cakmak, 2006). This self-regulating behavior is called homeostasis. What is unique to each family is what the level of homeostasis is and what processes the family goes through to maintain it (Reiter, 2015).

Steinglass (2008) explained how homeostasis works within families when he wrote about the two powers that shape family behavior: morphostatic and morphogenic powers.

Morphostatic power tries to regulate and maintain the status quo. Morphogenetic power allows

the family to grow, change, and adapt. In homes where alcohol is abused, the family system (and these powers) is organized around protecting the family members from the effects of the drinking and allowing the drinking to continue (Schmid & Brown, 2008). The system tries to maintain the status quo and continues to adapt to the erratic behavior. This becomes normalized and the family continues to adapt even to its own detriment.

Family systems can be understood as an ever-evolving structure. Each member acts and reacts to any given input. Each part impacts the other; they are mutually influential. While each family follows a given pattern or set of rules, these rules are constantly changing and the family adapts. Because of the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of family members, it is beneficial to examine family systems when discussing alcoholism. Alcoholism disrupts a family in a variety of ways. The family adapts and rearranges itself to allow for the disruptions.

Whitchurch and Constantine (1993) reasoned, “systems approaches generally view problematic behaviors as becoming entrenched in the family’s relational system and recurring because of the patterned nature of components’ transactions in the systems” (p. 341). In other words, the problematic behavior of the drinker continues because the family system has adapted to it in some way and allows it to continue. Smilkstein’s (1980) cycle of family function confirmed that a family could maintain its pathological equilibrium withstanding abuse and intoxication to keep family stability.

Rotunda et al. (1995) stated family systems theories “propose that families develop organizing principles that govern family process and individual family members' behaviors” (p. 98). Part of this organization of the family is through subsystems, which are smaller relationships within the larger familial unit (spousal, parental, sibling) (Rotunda et al., 1995). In

a home affected by alcoholism each of the subsystems is disrupted as well as the family as a whole.

The family tries to be supportive to the alcoholic but they do so in unhealthy ways. Their enabling behavior is done in a loving and supportive manner but makes it easier for the addiction to continue. Liepman, Flachier, and Tareen (2008) state, “adaption to the addict’s dysfunctional behavior and drug induced personality and behavior changes alter the family’s behavioral repertoire” (p. 62). Soon the loving feelings are replaced by anger and resentment.

Each relationship changes as a result of the alcoholism as they fill in for, hide from, react to, and cover for the alcoholic. Children may take on more adult like responsibilities, spouses may work longer hours, and grandparents may help out more with their grown child’s household. These are just a few small examples of ways in which a family may be affected. It is beyond the scope of this project to recount the numerous ways in which a family can be affected as each family is different and it is not the focus of this research. Individual members of a family affected by alcoholism are critical to the research of this dissertation. For that reason, the literature on the effects of alcoholism in families has been reviewed.

In most homes there are unspoken rules. In alcoholic homes these rules help to keep the family insulated and isolated from the outside world. Rules like “we do not talk about family issues with people who are outside the family,” “we do not talk about feelings,” and “we must maintain what we are doing to keep everything afloat,” are typical rules in alcoholic homes.

Pledge and Pledge (2013), sought to give voice to children in alcoholic homes:

The unspoken rules of "don't talk, don't trust, don't feel" are present as the shame of the family is hidden, and they try to believe that they are not different from other families. These youth want to feel safe, loved, respected, and believe they are normal. (p. 36)

The family circles around its problems and turns away from others. This cycle of secrecy and isolation perpetuates the problem of keeping other people away. Members do not know who they can trust outside of the family. Some do not believe they have feelings, are lovable, or are even normal.

Families affected by alcoholism show a great deal of stress. Copello, Velleman, and Templeton (2005) stated there is solid evidence that substance abuse has negative effects in families. In his study, Kroll (2004) compared seven studies on the effects of children living in homes with alcohol and drugs and outlined six themes that children encounter when living with a substance abuser: denial, distortion, and secrecy; attachment, preparation, and loss; family functioning, conflict, and breakdown; violence, abuse, and fear; role reversal, role confusion, and child as carer; and what the children said they needed. Kroll (2004) found that:

It is generally assumed that, since it is the substance misuse that causes problems for children, once this is 'treated' or parents are helped to manage their substance use, the problems will go away and all will be well. What was apparent, however, was that children needed continued support, even after treatment, due to unresolved feelings, adjustments to new roles, rules and behaviours, new fears and anxieties (p. 137)

Children are part of a family that has been disrupted and disturbed by alcoholism. The underlying issues that caused the alcoholism in the first place have not been resolved. The children continue to use the skills they learned while living in a chaotic home. They need support and guidance to learn how to live without the alcoholism and abuse. They need to be taught new skills and ways of living to get out of survival mode and in to living.

Many researchers agree that alcoholism greatly impacts families. Csiernik (2002a) wrote that one in four children live with a family that has a history of alcohol abuse and that these children have lower test scores in school, have lower trust levels, and struggle to develop and

maintain intimate relationships. Rotunda et al. (1995) found that alcoholic families are more dysfunctional and troubled. They have higher levels of competitiveness, conflict, and negativity. They tend to isolate, do not get along as well as other families, and struggle with solving problems. Family members are more independent of each other. Families continue to struggle whether the problem drinker continues to drink or not. The family has learned new ways of coping and dealing with the disease they are living with. Many are in survival mode and coping as best they can without thinking of the future. Because of the constant arranging and rearranging that the family has done to cope with the alcoholic to normalize the situation, they forget how to live (or have never learned) how to live without the disease present in the home. “Understanding Alcoholism” from the Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., Service Manual (2013) explains how families and friends are affected by alcoholism (see Appendix E):

Alcoholism is a family disease. Compulsive drinking affects the drinker and it affects the drinker’s relationships. Friendships, employment, childhood, parenthood, love affairs, and marriages all suffer from the effects of alcoholism. Those special relationships in which a person is really close to an alcoholic are affected most, and we who care are the most caught up in the behavior of another person. We react to an alcoholic’s behavior. Seeing that the drinking is out of hand, we try to control it. We are ashamed of the public scenes but try to handle it in private. It isn’t long before we feel we are to blame and take on the hurts, the fears, and the guilt of an alcoholic. We, too, can become ill . . . Perhaps the most severe damage to those of us who have shared some part of life with an alcoholic comes in the form of the nagging belief that we are somehow at fault. We may feel it was something we did or did not do—that we were not good enough, not attractive enough, or not clever enough to have solved this problem for the one we love.
(pp. 26–27)

Family members who live with alcoholics try everything to change the situation: manipulation, mothering, martyrdom, and more to reach homeostasis. Rules are bent, feelings are hurt, secrets are hidden, roles are reversed, and insanity ensues. Until treatment or help is sought and found, the cycle of disease continues.

There are many treatments for substance abusers, alcoholics, and problem drinkers. Many are widely known. What about the families? How do they get help?

Treatments

Alcoholism is a worldwide issue. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Addiction and Abuse (2016), “16.3 million adults ages 18 and older had an AUD in 2014” (Alcohol Use Disorder, para. 1) and nearly 80,000 alcohol related deaths occur annually. Family members all over the world need help in learning how to recover from or live with the effects of drinking in the family. There are a variety of ways that families get help including interventions, different types of therapy, and support groups to name a few. Although most of the literature speaks to the need to assist families, it is not the focus of the research. Essentially, the research is aimed at getting the problem drinker into treatment. While this is a very worthwhile goal, it is not the only important thing in assisting families with alcoholism. As previously reviewed, families are greatly impacted by the drinking of their loved ones. Each of the family members’ needs help in their own right. What follows is a discussion of each of the suggested methods of treatment for helping families to cope with a member who is alcoholic.

Copello et al. (2005) suggested three types of intervention with varying levels of family member inclusion. In the first type, the family is involved in an intervention to help the alcoholic get into treatment. In this intervention the focus is mainly on the drinker. It may be a good first step for the family to finally talk about what is going on openly with each other and a counselor but unfortunately in most programs the family involvement ends when the family member agrees to treatment. The second type of intervention also aims to get the alcohol user into treatment with the involvement of the family. The family changes their behavior in order to encourage the user

into sobriety. The final category of intervention focuses solely on the family and their need of treatment. This is the type of the treatment that will be focused on in this study.

There are some organizations that target the family members and train them how to persuade the alcoholic into treatment. In these types of intervening, the family learns effective ways to respond to the drinking, plan different activities that discourage drinking, to confront the person about his drinking, and encourage him to seek treatment (Copello et al., 2005). The three most well-known of these types of programs are: A Relational Intervention Sequence (ARISE), The Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT) program, and the Johnson intervention. In each of these, the goal is to get the alcohol abuser into treatment. In ARISE, the focus is on the family members and often the user is not involved in the meetings until later in the intervention. This model strives to empower the social network surrounding the drinker to establish trusting and honest relationships with him letting him know that they want long-term relationships with him.

A therapist works with the family in the ARISE model until the user enters treatment. There are three levels. In Level 1, a member of the drinker's family or social support system reaches out for help. A therapist works with this person and encourages her to include as many people from the family and social circle as possible. In Level 2 the therapist meets with the family and others to help motivate them through the process. In Level 3 the therapist helps the family set limits and consequences for the person who continues to drink. The drinker can be involved at any of the three levels and can agree to enter treatment at any time, in which case the family does not continue to the next level of intervention. According to Reiter (2015), the ARISE model has an 83% success rate in helping the family get the substance abuser into treatment. The

research does not talk about what happens to the family after the person enters treatment. The lack of discussion of the family after the alcoholic enters treatment in the literature suggests that the family is no longer a consideration.

CRAFT is a similar program that focuses on the family to encourage the drinker into treatment. The family members and significant others are taught how to use operant conditioning principles to reward sober behaviors (Reiter, 2015). With operant conditioning family members reward or punish the alcoholic based on his behavior. If the drinker is drinking, for example, the family may choose to do a fun activity and exclude her. If she chooses a soda instead of a beer, the family may do a preferred activity of the drinker together. Reiter listed a 58.6% success rate with this model. The family again is not mentioned after the drinker seeks treatment.

The Johnson intervention (also called Intervention) started in the 1960s by Vernon Johnson (Reiter, 2015) was formed on the belief that anyone who cares for someone with a problem of alcoholism or drug addiction can help that person. The primary goal of Intervention is to get the family member to stop drinking or using otherwise he will die from the disease. Interventions can be formal or informal but need to be well planned out in advance. The family members, friends, and other loved ones gather together to confront the drinker with the truth. They tell him how his using disrupts the family/work/social life. His drinking impacts many facets of his life as well as the lives of so many others. The intervention is an attempt to show what is really happening to the drinker so he cannot deny what he is doing any longer. Each person in the room shares detailed facts or specific examples of what the drinking has done to them personally. The drinker is offered a specific treatment center or hospital program and is sent there immediately if he agrees to go. Once the alcoholic agrees to treatment and goes, the

family and friends are left behind. The intervention does not provide help for family members. However, if they used a therapist to guide the intervention, the therapist may be able to suggest treatment for the family as well.

While many of these models and interventions aim to help families, most of them do not once the person has entered treatment because the priority of intervention is the drinker or user (Kuuluvainen & Isotalus, 2014). Very little to no attention is paid to the family after treatment or if the drinker chooses not to get treatment at all. Fischer, Korinek, and Mulsow (2007) expressed their frustration with the lack of treatment for families:

We are mindful of the severe problems facing families in the areas of prevention and therapy. There are not enough funds, not enough treatment centers, and not enough understanding of the problems of alcoholism and alcohol misuse. Although the professional field may have evolved from an emphasis on individual morality and pathology to a systems understanding of alcohol problems, the political landscape seems hostile to using the results of science to help the family members who struggle with addiction. (p. 6)

There is an acknowledgement that families need help but getting the family help remains difficult. The availability for help from professionals or social agencies is meager (Kuuluvainen & Isotalus, 2014).

Therapy

While there may be a lack of understanding and consideration of what happens to the family after the drinker seeks treatment, there is progress. More recent research suggests involving the family in therapy to be effective in changing the behavior of the alcoholic or user. These therapies are social in nature, situate the drinking in a social context, and build the support system of the addict and the family alike. Working with the family as a unit takes the focus away from individual pathology and focuses on the interactions of each family member (Csiernik,

2002a). It acknowledges that all families have issues but that substance abuse has exacerbated the problem and prevented a resolution, each member has a stake in the claim and has to work to bring about change and recovery, and each member has to take personal responsibility for his or her actions and reactions. The following section will describe some of the types of therapies that focus on families struggling with addiction. These would fall into Copello et al.'s (2005) second level of intervention.

Unilateral family therapy (UFT) uses a model based on systems. In UFT it is thought that the family dynamics can be changed without all family members participating in the therapy (Copello et al., 2005). In this therapy the family works on changing their own behavior in hopes it will encourage the user into sobriety. When members in the family work on their self-esteem, increase their social network, and develop new ways of coping, the alcoholic may also want the same things and begin to change.

Alcohol focused behavioral couples therapy (ABCT) has two goals: to help couples manage stress and to reduce alcohol related issues (Copello et al., 2005). This type of marital therapy focuses on strengthening the relationship between the drinker and his significant other to increase marital happiness. Thus the premise is that by bettering the relationship drinking will decrease. There is evidence that marital therapies help the drinker to reduce consumption and there are fewer separations than couples without the therapy (Copello et al., 2005).

Another type of therapy is Family Systems Therapy. Similar to AFT and ABCT, this therapy focuses on the couple's interactions, how they communicate and relate to each other. In addition, it looks at the meaning behind the drinking from both partners' perspectives (Copello et al., 2005). The couples, with the help of the therapist, seek to set goals for the drinking. Sobriety

may not be needed. Family Systems Therapy is often used when the problem drinker is a young person in the house. Copello et al. (2005) explained, “family based treatments aimed at adolescent substance misusers have been shown to lead to improved rates of school attendance and performance, improved family functioning, and reduced behavioural problems associated with the substance misuse” (p. 375). The use of positive connections among family members leads to better success for the young drinker and improves their functioning.

Social behavior and network therapy (SBNT) based in the United Kingdom continues along the same vein and promotes healthy and positive social networks to create change in the alcoholic behavior (Copello et al., 2005). Therapists reach out to the members of a drinker’s social network to help them build strategies to positively support the drinker.

Each of the treatment options mentioned previously is geared towards the alcoholic and getting her the help she needs. Csiernik (2002a), in a survey of the literature over a 15-year period found less than 12 research studies on the effects of alcoholism on families. The primary focus of these studies was how working with families aided the recovery of the individual with the drinking problem and not the issues facing the family members. There is very little research about the family’s recovery. The family who likely had been adjusting and readjusting their behaviors in response to a member’s alcoholism rather than focusing on healthy development is left often without treatment. Thus families often struggle to find ways to deal with a newly sober family member or one who drinks with less frequency. Csiernik (2002a) concluded:

If the individual seeks treatment and is successful and the substance abuse ceases, everyone within the nuclear family and often members of the extended family may become vulnerable to the unbalanced family system. This disequilibrium, created by the positive act of treatment and rehabilitation, can make the family seem and feel dysfunctional because they no longer know how to act or behave with the newly sober or straight person as part of their system. (p. 81)

Where once they knew their role and what to expect from the drinker, they are now at loss at how to respond to the drinker. For example a drinking parent once absent now wants to participate in parenting again. The spouse and children have to learn how to adjust to this new way of interacting in the family. When the family does not learn new skills to learn to adjust or assimilate to the new situation, new problems can ensue. Understanding the dynamic of family systems and their importance in maintaining, enabling, and changing members' behaviors argues for family members to have support to change and grow before, during, and after the drinker enters treatment. Although family treatment approaches may differ from those individuals striving for sobriety, they are equally important for families to develop concurrently adaptive, healthy functioning.

Self Help for the Family

Al-Anon is one source of help for the families. The driving purpose of Al-Anon is to help those who are affected by another person's drinking. In Al-Anon, people learn to focus on their own issues and to work on improving them. There is very little research on Al-Anon. This study will add to the small body of literature. To help guide the study on Al-Anon, what follows is an examination of how scholars research support groups in general.

Support Groups

In order to situate this study among other scholars, an examination of self-help or mutual aid groups including 12 Step programs is needed. How are support groups studied? This section of the chapter will provide a deeper understanding of effective strategies for support groups, the make-up of these groups, and the findings of empirical research. There is a wide breadth of subject matter that support groups cover. By uncovering the commonalities of these groups, a

better understanding of the components that are effective will emerge. Additional questions include: What are the specific qualities that make for successful groups regardless of why the group is together? How do these groups function without a leader?

A thorough review of the extant literature has shown that there are numerous types of support groups and there is much to learn about them. Although the articles are varied, explore different philosophies and topics, and are written for different purposes and audiences, several themes have emerged and gaps in the literature have been identified. In this review, themes were chosen that were applicable to five or more of the articles. As such, for this study and to ground the knowledge on support groups, the focus will be on five themes: communication, trust, comfort of knowing others in similar situations/ having had same type of experiences, sponsorship, and sense of self. Interestingly each of these themes is also a theme of Al-Anon. The majority of books in Al-Anon have an index in the back with a list of common words and phrases used throughout the book and program. The premise is that if you are feeling a certain way or wish to feel a certain way, you can turn to the index of any of the books and find writings on the same topic. It is to help the Al-Anon member to not feel alone or like they are the only one who has experienced whatever it is they are feeling. Many of the 12 Step programs have similar books for their members. Because each of the ideas tied in so nicely with existing Al-Anon literature and to connect the themes, each subsequent subsection will begin with a quote from a daily reader of Al-Anon that touches on that section's theme.

Communication. Many of the articles touched on the subject of communication. One common thread throughout all of the articles is communication.

Today by being aware of the words that I use, I am learning to communicate more responsibly. I not only share in a more straightforward manner, I also argue in a healthier

way. . . . I can talk about my feelings. I can explain the way I experienced something rather than telling the other person how he or she made me feel. I can talk about what I want. I am no longer a victim. What do my words communicate? Do they express what I am trying to say? Today I will listen more closely to what my words have to say. (Al-Anon Family Groups, 1992, p. 174)

Communicating with others is a central component of healing in support groups. People go to support groups to talk and listen to others. Arminen (2004) finds “mutual help, thus, is an art of interpersonal exchange where relationships between the participants are strongly reciprocal” (p. 341). They learn from others by hearing what they have to say about themselves and how they are coping with their illness or addiction. They learn about themselves by sharing what is going on in their own lives. Speaking aloud gives power to their inner thoughts. They co-create meaning in the exchanges that take place throughout the meetings.

Anderson’s (2013) phenomenological study on women who have experienced postpartum depression (PPD) and have attended a support group (for moms, working moms, or for PPD), sought to understand the value of communication and support within these groups. The women were asked to share times when communication played a positive or negative role when dealing with PPD. The research on the groups showed that the women were given the type of support one would expect in the meetings they attended: working moms’ groups found support talking to and sharing experiences with other working moms, stay at home moms found support with other stay at home moms, and women with PPD found comfort with other PPD sufferers. The women with PPD may have also been involved in the working mothers or stay at home mom groups and found support from them about those issues but in order to gain support on PPD, the PPD group was the place to be.

According to Arminen (2004), in A.A. meetings, members sharing their stories is an important form of communication and is helpful to the alcoholic, but responses to the sharing are even more important. The members who respond to the original member then share their own story as it relates to the first one. Together they create shared meaning and validate the experiences they have had. Coreil, Corvin, Nupp, Dyer, and Noble (2012) would agree: “the communication of real-life stories provides the glue that binds the group together, helps create an atmosphere of safety and trust, and encourages people to open up and relate to others on an intimate level” (pp. 914–915). According to Lederman and Menegatos (2011), “storytelling is part of an ongoing communicative process that symbolically forms and re-forms the storytellers’ identity/identities through their interactions with other recovering alcoholics and through their acceptance of the AA worldview” (p. 209). This can be said of interactions and the importance of storytelling in all mutual aid groups where members share their stories with each other. Together they reform their own identities and the identity of the group they share.

Al-Anon meetings share many similarities to A.A. meetings. In Kuuluvainen and Isotalus (2014), the researchers looked at both verbal and non-verbal forms of supportive communication within Al-Anon groups. In both types of meetings crosstalk is discouraged. In other words you may share your own story and connect it with the original sharer’s story but you may not comment on the person’s share. You can’t say “I agree” or “well done” or “no way” or anything similar. Other participants are supposed to be quiet unless they are sharing. Because of this, non-verbal communication is extremely important. With body language, eye contact, head nodding, and the like, participants convey their feelings and responses to the speaker. As noted by Kuuluvainen and Isotalus (2014),

Nonverbal expressions of listening, empathy, understanding, agreement and other reactions while another member was talking played an important role in the meetings. Intensive silence, leaning forward, head nods and shakes, sighing and laughing were non-verbal substitutes for spontaneous verbal support. (p. 431)

This study focused on four types of supportive communication: emotional support, informational support, esteem support, and social network support. It went on to describe how each of these types is valued in Al-Anon meetings. Emotional support can be seen in the nonverbal communication mentioned above and also in the use of humor (which can manifest itself in self-deprecating humor, sarcasm, and as a way to lighten the mood after heavy topics are discussed), hope and encouragement (members often mention a silver lining in their shares even if going through dark phases of life), understanding (members are empathetic toward one another), and confidentiality (everyone upholds this principal to assure what is said in the room stays in the room thereby allowing people to share what is really in their hearts and minds (Kuuluvainen & Isotalus, 2014).

Informational support is given in the form of suggestions, teachings, and allegories (Kuuluvainen & Isotalus, 2014). Members use each of these while sharing to convey messages to fellow members and newcomers. Sometimes they will suggest by encouraging everyone to get a sponsor if they don't already have one, or attend more and varied meetings regularly or to be of service. They may teach other through their shares about what they know about Al-Anon, alcoholism, their own pride, or their higher power. They may also use slogans and other iterations from the Al-Anon literature like "giving is receiving" or "live and let live." All of these are used to express what has been helpful to their own recovery.

Relief of guilt, compliments, and expressions of gratitude are ways support manifest in meetings. A founding idea of Al-Anon is that alcoholism is a disease and that the drinker is

powerless over his or her addiction. Al-Anon members are taught the three C's. They did not cause nor can they control or cure the problem of alcoholism in their loved one. This is a huge relief to many. So many suffer embarrassment and shame over the drinking of their spouse, child, friend or other loved one. It is helpful to learn that they are not responsible. Alcohol is the culprit. The only one who can change the drinking is the drinker when he or she is ready to make the change. Hand in hand with relieving guilt is providing hope and encouragement to the participants and this is accomplished through complimentary comments and expressions of gratitude. Members congratulate each other on the progress they make; they thank each other for listening and for being supportive. Members are able to see the growth of others more easily than they can see their own growth. Compliments and gratitude are so important to share so newcomers can begin to see the changes in themselves through hearing the stories of change from others.

Network support allows members to feel they belong. Members share their phone numbers with newcomers and each other and encourage them to call between meetings. They are told they are no longer alone. Al-Anon members often meet before or after meetings to continue with the fellowship. There are retreats and conventions, which further strengthen ties to each other. They learn that their primary aim should be taking care of themselves, and with the support of their Al-Anon friends, they learn to do just that (Kuuluvainen & Isotalus, 2014).

In their 2014 study, Kuuluvainen and Isotalus found that supportive communication is a fundamental process that occurs naturally in Al-Anon meetings. Each participant in Al-Anon meetings is a member. She is learning how to recover from the effects of loving an alcoholic. She seeks new information at the same time as she shares the information that she has. The other

members do the same. In this way there is reciprocity in the communication. Individuals learn from each other and from their experiences. There is no hierarchy of leadership or of learning. Each is on the same level and has something to offer from newcomers on their first day to long timers with 50+ years of experience. Another benefit to this is that each member has a purpose from the beginning to the end and can always learn something new. They belong and as such, they serve a purpose. This also provides a safe environment to learn how to be in relationship with people in a healthy manner. Built into the communication with each other, there is feedback, thoughtfulness, and an expectation of truth. Members learn to say more than they are “fine.” They are taught to give voice to their feelings and emotions so they can learn to identify them. They are also taught to act fine by showing support to others in the group. Kuuluvainen and Isotalus (2014) found, “In this way, the members can feel that they possess power over the surrounding situation through communication . . . It also echoes the Al-Anon ideology that one can only change one’s self” (p. 51). The ultimate goal is to change one’s self for the better.

Trust. Many who seek help in support groups have had experiences that have caused them to distrust others. “Today I can choose to trust my recovery, the tools of the program and my Higher Power, and to recognize how very far I have come” (Al-Anon Family Groups, 1992, p. 169). “Al-Anon has helped me to trust my experiences more than the inconsistent words of others” (Al-Anon Family Groups, 1992, p. 232).

Trust can be difficult to establish. Participants in Al-Anon, for example, have been hurt by alcoholics mentally, emotionally and possibly physically. Their trust in their loved one (the alcoholic) is jeopardized. They then begin to lose trust in others because if their loved ones treat them as badly as they do, surely they deserve it or that is just the way life is. Their worldview is

distorted because of their experiences. Al-Anon then offers them a place where they learn to trust again by allowing them a safe place to learn about alcoholism and themselves. Zajdow (1998) explained it this way:

In situations where trust and mutuality have disintegrated, as is the case in alcoholic families, women start to build these up anew in Al-Anon. They are prompted to renew their relationship with others by using their own experiences as support for those who come after them. The processes of the group allow them to gently reintegrate themselves into the community, first of Al-Anon, then further afield. (p. 88)

In support groups, participants learn to trust themselves, others and possibly a Higher Power (as in the 12 Step programs). In A.A., members also find a trusting environment. Alcoholics while drinking have often pushed their loved ones away or their loved ones having been lied to, cheated on, or disappointed by the alcoholic too many times and have severed any connection with them. They have lost the ability to trust or to be trustworthy. They relearn it from others in the group and working the program of A.A.

Coatsworth-Puspoky, Forchuk, and Ward-Griffin (2006) studied peer support relationships (PSRs) in the context of mental health. These relationships are slightly different than support groups but provide insight into group member relationships. Participants in PSRs found “lack of trust and not being open to receiving support contributed to the deterioration of the relationship” (Coatsworth-Puspoky et al., 2006, p. 494). This would translate to the relationships in other support groups. If participants were unwilling to make some changes or open themselves up to the possibility of help from or connection to others, it would be difficult to form a relationship with them. Adamsen (2002) found:

The trust that participants in a self-help group have in one another rests on mutual understanding and empathy. They share a common story and this makes it possible for them to find, in the group, a ‘free space’ where they are not expected to explain, defend or excuse their moods. (p. 227)

According to Zajdow (1998), in her study on social capital in Al-Anon, trust is an important factor for relationship building. Trust is built by sharing experiences and “it acts to aid people isolated by the trauma of alcoholism to develop trust in each other and to learn reciprocity as part of the group's processes” (p. 80). Trusting other group members allows the participants share more of themselves thereby earning trust from others. Those who are unable to open up and trust the other group members can feel alone and isolated. These members may then choose to drop or even sabotage the group’s efforts by being negative and stuck in their ways. They do not grow or change.

Similar experiences. Terminal uniqueness is not unique to people who seek help for their addictions or other problems in support groups. People in support groups find others with similar experiences and it helps them feel like they belong somewhere.

By the time we reach Al-Anon, many of us are starving to be heard. We bask in the discovery that the Al-Anon rooms are safe places in which we can talk about the things that have been pent-up inside. We share, and the people around us nod with understanding. They talk with us after meetings and mention how much they identify, or they thank us for sharing. Finally we are heard and appreciate by others who have been there too. (Al-Anon Family Groups, 1992, p. 308)

A simple Google search of the term “terminal uniqueness,” provides a litany of pages of articles, blogs, and treatment centers all dealing with recovery issues. Alcoholrehab.com offers, “Terminal uniqueness is the belief that the situation the individual is facing is unlike anything faced by other people. It is called *terminal* uniqueness because this way of thinking can get people killed” (Terminal uniqueness, n.d.). Terminal uniqueness is the feeling that you are alone in how you feel. You believe that you are the only person who has ever felt like you do and that no one has ever had the same experiences (or even similar experiences) you have had. It feels

like no one else can understand you because they do not know what it is like to be you. Many who experience terminal uniqueness, isolate themselves from other people because of shame or feeling weird or not being able to connect with what others are experiencing. It also allows them to deny that they have a problem with alcohol, or drugs. One woman anonymously shared on orchidrecoverycenter.com

I know in my story there were many things that I believed to be unique to my situation because in my life I had no direct contact with people who had experienced some of the same difficulties or situations. In fact a few of the things that happened early on in my life such a physical abuse, the deaths of a few people close to me, and the relationships and circumstances at home were actually the biggest excuses I used to drink and use drugs, and most people let me get away with it because I used that explanation of struggling with issues no one around me could understand. (Orchid, 2014, Understanding Terminal Uniqueness para. 1)

According to Lederman and Menegatos (2011), “many recovering alcoholics use the term “terminal uniqueness” to describe the sense of how different they believed they were from others until they found others like themselves in AA” (p. 214). Finding others who share the same feelings and experiences is comforting and allows connections to form.

One of the benefits of attending a support group is that individuals meet others who have had similar experiences and have felt similar emotions. This eases some of the feelings of terminal uniqueness and allows participants to connect with others. Adamsen (2002) in working with HIV/Aids Cancer support groups found “the members have common experiences and can identify with each other. Being with people who cope with similar problems in their lives to some extent alleviates the sense of loneliness and isolation” (p. 226). Adamsen elaborated explaining that members of the group suddenly feel normal because what they are experiencing became a common ground for themselves and those in the support group. This is a unifying thread in many support groups.

Returning once again to Anderson (2013) and his study on postpartum (PPD) support groups, he found this to be true with women he was studying,

Perhaps the biggest strength of this study is that it illuminates the support group experiences of women with PPD. As a muted and understudied group, women with PPD are marginalized by their own support networks, society, medical professionals, and the research community. This study found that support groups serve to help normalize these women's experience by validating their symptoms and explaining to them that there symptoms are normal, in the context of PPD. While normal can be used to refer to both the desire to be like mothers without PPD and as a way of referring to the symptoms of PPD and the fact that women are not suffering alone, the simple use of the word normal problematizes the condition and creates a false sense of what normal is for mothers, both with and without PPD symptoms. This further underscores the need for additional research that gives voice to women with PPD and other maternal health issues. (p. 722)

Similar experiences also help people with cancer in support groups learn to cope with what they are going through. According to Coreil, Wilke, and Pintado (2004):

Members encounter other breast cancer survivors with whom they have things in common, be it similar family or job setting, type of tumor, or treatment regimen. They are then able to gauge their own progress or adjustment in relation to these other people. Seeing what others have overcome can be inspiring, and for a survivor, seeing others who have it worse can help put the situation in perspective. Simply having others against whom to make any type of comparison can be reassuring. (p. 915)

Hearing what others go through in their treatment also takes away the uncertainty of what will happen next. It allows the person with cancer to have more control over the situation because they have heard the stories of others going through the same thing (Coreil et al., 2004). They are then able to anticipate what might happen with them and make choices based on their newly acquired knowledge.

In their work on support groups for Alzheimer's caregivers support groups, Sabir, Pillemer, Sutor, and Patterson (2003), sought to determine what made supporting relationships successful. They believed that individuals would have better experiences with support systems if they were partnered with other individuals with similar backgrounds- age, education level,

ethnicity, etc. Their findings however showed that what was most impactful were that both individuals had experience of being a caregiver of someone with Alzheimer's. The common ground of a shared experience connected people together more than similar backgrounds.

In Al-Anon like other 12 step programs, members share their experiences through storytelling. Participants connect with each other by finding the common ground in their stories. Cutter and Cutter (1987) suggest that participants at Al-Anon meetings have been socialized to group norms and view "themselves and other through the eyes of Al-Anon as a significant generalized other" (p. 31). So not only do members experience the stories of others who share experiences similar to their own but also together they create a shared culture, which allows this to continue to happen. It is organic to the program because of the shared norms. People tend to follow the same process when sharing: they tell what happened or what problems they may have had and then share how Al-Anon has helped with the problem. "Sharings" are mostly positive and optimistic. Even when things are not going well, the person will often say something like she is going through a rough patch but knows she will eventually come out the other side and will have benefitted from the concern in some way.

While each group may experience it in different ways, participants' ability to connect with others who have had similar experiences is powerful. It allows the individual to see that she is not alone. When she is able to see that she is not alone she is able to see the steps taken by people farther along in their recovery process. She is able to see that she too can take steps to make improvements to her life. Some of these steps are as basic (although challenging) as changing her attitude about what she is experiencing. Each of us wants to belong somewhere. When someone experiences the feelings of terminal uniqueness she does not believe she belongs

anywhere. Stepping into a support group helps her to see that she is no longer alone or terminally unique.

Sense of self. In self-help groups people experience a change in themselves.

I won't let old, limiting ideas and doubts go unchallenged. I may discover strengths and talents that never had the chance to come to light. Today, by letting go of obsolete ideas, I have an opportunity to learn something wonderful about myself. (Al-Anon Family Groups, 1992, p. 192)

Lederman and Menegatos (2011) wrote “It is their ability to look at themselves honestly, and in that sense to be self-reflexive, that is the root of their changing understanding of themselves, and ultimately, of their changed or sustained behavior” (pp. 220–221). In many incidences, individuals form new, changed identities from when they were addicts or before they had cancer, HIV, or mental illness or before they became affected by someone else's illness. Weegman and Piwowitz-Hjort (2009) claimed, “what is usually important is that the recovering person finds a way of conceptualizing a viable ‘non-using’ identity, one that fits both a personal process of change as well as representing a more ‘public’ communication of a changed status” (p. 281). This transformation into a new identity can also be a part of the recovery process.

Lederman and Menegatos (2011) argued “that storytelling in AA is a form of reflexive self-persuasion that facilitates sustained recovery, including the development of what we conceptualize as the ‘aspirational self’” (p. 207). In their study, storytelling became the vehicle for the change in members. They continued, “sharing one's story of recovery is a form of self-disclosure. When people self-disclose, they share their personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences and reveal aspects of who they are . . . it can facilitate one's relationship with one's self” (p. 215). Arminen (2004) agreed “mutual help is an interactional achievement based on stories told in a sequence in which reciprocally narrated and shaped stories allow parties to

reflect upon their identities to solve their problems” (p. 320). Denzin (1987) proposed

Central to the recovery of self is learning how to become a storyteller about one’s own life, before and after AA membership. The self is recovered in and through the stories the member learns to tell. Talking and listening thus become the key processes that structure the member’s new senses of AA selfhood. (as cited by Arminen, 2004, pp. 319–320)

For some opening up and sharing their story is easy to do. For others, it takes time to feel like they belong. Kingree (2000) contended “respondents who had struggled for a longer period of time with their problems and who had lower esteem may have perceived more potential benefits in the ACOA group than their counterparts” (p. 91). This is good news for those who are struggling. If they continue to work the program and find a connection with the group, they have a better chance of improving their self-esteem. The support groups by their very name offer individuals a place where they can find support. If they allow the process to work for them, changes will most likely occur. Adamsen (2002) added:

The self-help groups can provide the participants with an alternative, complementary network, a supplement to the existing primary and secondary networks. It may be concluded that self-help groups are socially significant and that participation in a self-help group functions as a pillar of the third network; self-help groups are a valuable means of supporting and strengthening the participant’s individual network. (p. 228)

This third network connects people to each other and allows them to be supported. Their shared goals of recovery and support provide a caring community of likeminded people. In Al-Anon for example it is very common for someone to share that the “people in these rooms (of the meetings of Al-Anon) loved me until I could love myself.” Meaning the group saw the good in her, loved her, held her up, and supported her until she was able to see the good in herself and to start loving herself too. When the groups do this for each other, individuals begin to change.

Summary. Support groups are a place where people go to give and receive help for a common condition. There are hundreds of different types of support groups but the most

common are 12 Step programs. A discussion of the review of the literature found five dominant themes: communication, trust, similar experiences, and sense of self. Many of these ideas intertwine with each other. Communication is one of the most fundamental aspects of a support group. People attend support groups to talk and to listen and learn about the illness or addiction they have. Their support group gives the participant a safe outlet to talk about what is really going on. They can be authentic in their storytelling because the room is filled with people who understand and have had similar experiences. They can express anger, frustration, sadness, fear, envy, happiness, and whatever feelings they may have without fear of judgment. In some groups, participants learn to express gratitude in times of difficulty. They learn to give and receive compliments. By learning to express whatever they need to in the supportive group setting, they learn how to identify what is really going on inside them. This helps them learn more about themselves and helps them communicate with their loved ones outside of the group. They have learned to trust the group, themselves, and then others. The trust is built on sharing with other members who have experienced similar things. They learn it is safe to share in meetings or with a sponsor and then they see that they are no longer terminally unique. This lessens feelings of isolation and allows the person to feel like they belong somewhere. This in turns allows them to connect, let their guard down further, see there are no repercussions for sharing, and so on. It allows others to see them for who they really are and connect in deeper ways.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship is a supporting and mentoring type relationship between two Al-Anon members. Each works her own program and each benefits from the relationship. Sponsorship is found in most 12 Step programs. Sponsorship is not mandatory but is encouraged. A sponsor is

someone who helps a sponsee work the steps in the 12 Step program. She acts as a guide, a confidant, a mentor, and a friend. While the group helps participants trust others, the sponsor helps a sponsee trust in one person, her sponsor, in a profound way. Crape, Latkin, Laris, and Knowlton (2002), describe what sponsors do:

Normatively, sponsors in NA and AA provide their sponsees 12-step instruction, a set of codified procedures to promote abstinence, to improve relationships and to inspire fundamental changes in life-style. Each step is designed to progressively deal with different problems and issues to stimulate different areas of growth. Sponsors in NA and AA generally provide peer counseling, crisis intervention, guidance and life direction, encouragement and spiritual advise for the 12-stepper that they are sponsoring. (p. 292)

Sponsors in Al-Anon and other 12 Step programs provide similar help to their sponsees as well. Members of 12 Step groups are encouraged to find a sponsor early in their recovery.

Whelan, Marshall, Ball, and Humphreys (2009) interviewed 36 sponsors to determine the role of a sponsor. They found “three superordinate roles—working the programme of AA, support giving, and carrying the message of AA” (p. 420). Sponsors aid in recovery and act as a guide through the steps and other elements of the program. They are someone with whom a member can share openly about private matters that may not be appropriate for a meeting. Sharing in a meeting is often done so in a short amount of time (three to five minutes). Because of the time limitation members are taught to share in a general way their circumstance and its impact on their lives.

Sponsees are suggested to keep in close contact with their sponsors (especially early in the program). They are encouraged to check in before doing anything drastic. It is said jokingly in Al-Anon that sponsors tell their sponsees to “pick up the phone before they pick up the gun.” In A.A., it is said to “call your sponsor before you drink.” Often a sponsor is a sounding board. Sponsees tell sponsors their frustrations and often the sponsor can see a different side of the

situation because they are not emotionally attached. The sponsor can show them options they may not have been able to see on their own because they are too close to the situation. They are encouraged to turn to a sponsor to share more in depth or in times of trouble. Tonigan and Rice (2010) commented that “two AA members may have frequent social contact outside of AA meetings, and it is commonly recommended that AA members contact a sponsor when abstinence is at risk” (p. 397). Both sponsors and sponsees benefit from the relationship. A sponsee is given guidance and tools on how to work the program. Tonigan and Rice found that those who acquired a sponsor early on in the A.A. program were more likely to still be attending A.A. after one year. They also found that:

Having an AA sponsor during early AA affiliation was significantly and positively predictive of later abstinence, regardless of whether abstinence did or did not consider the use of illicit drugs. Illustrating the advantage of having an AA sponsor, for instance, participants with sponsors at 3 months were almost three times as likely to be abstinent from alcohol at 6 months as AA-exposed adults who had not acquired an AA sponsor. (Tonigan & Rice, 2010, p. 401)

Witbrodt and Kaskutas (2005) reported that in their study meeting attendance and 12 step activities attributed to abstinence but having a sponsor in early recovery had the greatest impact.

As noted, sponsees benefit in many ways from sponsorship but what do the sponsors get from the relationship? Crape et al. (2002) asserted “the impact of being a sponsor is purported by the organizations and members of NA and AA to positively contribute not only to the recovery of the person being sponsored but to the sponsors’ recovery as well” (p. 292). It is a mutually beneficial relationship. Whelan et al. (2009) pointed out that it is beneficial to the sponsor because helping others helps him maintain his sobriety. Crape et al. (2002) confirmed this “recent research has confirmed that, in the context of mutual-aid group, giving help is a predictor of improved psychosocial adjustment and receiving help that supports cognitive

reframing was associated with improved social adjustment” (p. 297). Being of service to the newcomers or their sponsees, allows them to stay connected with the program. As they walk a sponsee through the steps, sponsors share their experiences with working the steps and the rest of the program. It is one way in which the sponsor actively works the program.

Young (2012) wanted to learn more about the people in these relationships. Is there a certain demographic of people who seek out sponsors? Are there certain people that become sponsors? Young (2012) found that:

Little evidence supports the construction of a demographic or experience-based “profile” for either sponsees or sponsors. Of 36 separate comparisons, 29 (80.6%) found no significant between-group difference. No significant differences emerged among the 20 tests of substance use experience variables, strongly suggesting that those experiencing the most severe alcohol dependence are just as capable of finding sponsors and serving as sponsors as those with milder dependence and fewer alcohol-related consequences. Sex, ethnicity, employment, and education were unrelated to a member’s status as either a sponsee or a sponsor. (p. 61)

Anyone who is working the program can sponsor another person. They do not have to have anything else in common. It is up to the sponsee to determine what she is looking for in the relationship and to find someone who fits that description and is willing to sponsor her.

Unfortunately there is very little research on sponsorship in 12 Step programs. The main focus of the sponsorship literature is Alcoholics Anonymous. While A.A. is very closely related to Al-Anon, the sponsorship relationship in Al-Anon has a different purpose. Because of this, there was a need to find a relationship that is similar to sponsorship and that has been studied in depth. A similar relationship was found in mentorship.

Mentorship

The sponsorship relationship is one in which one person helps or guides another. While there are many relationships that involve helping others, it was difficult to find one similar to

sponsorship. Helping relationships and therapeutic relationships were briefly examined, however these relationships involve fee for service and a professional delivering that service. There is a hierarchical structure in these relationships, which is not true of sponsorship. Mentoring is a helping relationship that occurs formally and informally and in a variety of situations such as in businesses where new hires are paired with experienced employees, in schools where new teachers are partnered with teachers who have taught for several years, and in communities where youth are mentored by youth workers, pastors, and other older members of the community. According to Dondero (1997), "A mentor is defined as one who listens to, cares for, gives advice to and shares information and life/career experiences with another, especially a young person requiring assistance" (p. 882). The relationship does not include payment for service but does include one member of the dyad who has more knowledge or skills in an area and is willing to share that knowledge or skills with someone less experienced.

There are three main types of mentoring relationships referenced in the literature: mentoring youth or young people, mentoring in an organizational or professional context, and mentoring in academics especially for new teachers and nursing students. Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, and DuBois (2008) suggested that mentoring follows life stages, youth, academic, and work as these are important times in our lives when we are likely to reach out to someone with more experience to guide us. For this section of the literature review articles were sought that were more general and could apply to all of these areas. Looking at the information in a general way made it more applicable to the relationship in Al-Anon. Rather than focusing on the type of mentoring relationship the articles discussed, the focus was on what the relationship did for each partner and what was unique or special about the mentoring relationship in general. In other

words, the search was for the common ground of mentoring. For example, Dondero (1997) wrote about mentoring high school students and the benefits he sees for both the mentors and the protégés. He stated, “a mentoring relationship with a supportive adult offers young people someone to whom they can turn when no other adult is available” (p. 886). He continued adding that both mentors and protégés benefit from these relationships. While his thoughts are about youth mentoring, they are applicable to other areas. A mentor is someone a protégé can turn to when no one else is available and in most cases both benefit from the relationship in some way.

Several topics emerged from the literature:

- Functions of mentorship,
- Formal vs. informal mentorship,
- Characteristics of an ideal mentor,
- Stages/Steps of relationship,
- Perceived costs and benefits of mentoring, and
- Leadership Theories.

An examination of these topics in regards to mentoring and an application of them towards sponsorship in Al-Anon will follow.

Functions of mentorship. Although there are at least three different types of mentoring relationships—youth, professional, and academic, there is agreement that all three share the same two functions: career related functions and psychosocial functions (Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010; Erdem & Aytemur, 2008; Kram & Isabella, 1985). Supporting career growth is somewhat obvious when it comes to organizational mentoring and academic mentoring. The mentor serves as a guide on how to get ahead in the work place or how to get the most out of the educational

experience to be in a more secure place (i.e., having more skills) when seeking a job. Given this context, you can also see that mentoring youth would also ultimately benefit them in their future careers. Youth might learn skills such as accountability and showing up to places on time or they could learn to broaden their experience and see that they are able to do more than they had thought before entering into a mentoring relationship.

Al-Anon fulfills these functions but instead of career guidance the sponsor gives program guidance. In other words, the sponsor helps guide the sponsee through the steps and traditions of the program. This is called working the steps and traditions. In short, the steps are a guide for the sponsee to live by, and the traditions are a guide on how to be in relationship with others. Included are relationships at home, work, and anywhere else where there are interactions with other people. The “career guidance” a sponsor provides is all program related. She may encourage her sponsee to “be of service” or help support the AFG program by setting up chairs, leading meetings or working at an Al-Anon conference. She may also gently remind her sponsee of things she may have done that were inappropriate at a meeting like breaking someone’s anonymity (talking about an alcoholic or other Al-Anon member by name), or using non-conference approved literature in a share (talking about a book that is not an Al-Anon book is said to dilute the program or take focus away from out common issues), or in any other way taking focus away from the program.

There is much to learn about the career guidance mentors provide. However this review will focus on the psychosocial function of mentoring which is more closely aligned with the sponsoring relationship in Al-Anon. The psychosocial function of the mentoring is less talked about in the extant literature and may be harder to determine. Kram and Isabella (1985)

explained psychosocial support as when a mentor “offers role modeling, counseling, confirmation, and friendship” to their protégé (p. 111). Thus, psychosocial support is often considered the more personalized aspect of mentoring.

Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, and Wilbanks (2011), outlined three core attributes of mentoring: reciprocity, developmental benefits, and regular/consistent interaction. These three attributes can be found in all forms of mentoring. Reciprocity means that both the mentor and protégé give and receive something from the relationship, including newfound skills, a fresh outlook on life, or even just companionship. Both stay in the relationship because they gain something. The developmental benefits are any skills they learn from each other that can be applicable to their work. Working and learning together benefits both of them. Lastly, the two consistently interact with each other. While their engagement varies in frequency and duration by dyad, getting together or communicating regularly are hallmarks of mentoring relationships

The psychosocial support a sponsor gives her sponsee is invaluable. “By asking someone to sponsor me, I express a willingness to experience more intimate relationships. When he or she is there for me, returning my calls, offering support, caring, I develop a basis for trust” (Al-Anon Family Groups, 1992, p. 363). The sponsor is someone who has more experience with the Al-Anon program than the sponsee but she is not an expert. She is not a teacher, teaching the sponsee, but rather a friend and guide that also works the program with her own sponsor. Working with a sponsor is an intimate experience where you often share your deepest darkest secrets and explore your emotions. What makes this relationship even more unique is that people become emotionally and psychologically intimate with their sponsors, and it is possible they don’t even know their last name or what job they have! Because of the anonymity of the program

and the desire to keep the focus on the program of Al-Anon, members are taught to leave outside issues, like their jobs and outside affiliations, outside the program. And yet, things that wouldn't be told to a best friend are told to a sponsor. Sponsors also share of their experience. They are willing to share their current challenges and pain and the tools of the program that help them move through it.

Revisiting Haggard et al. (2011), and their three core attributes of mentoring: reciprocity, developmental benefits, and regular/consistent interaction, these can be seen in the sponsorship relationship. While at the beginning of the relationship it may seem to the sponsee to be one sided with her sharing all of her grief, frustration, anger, etc. with her sponsor, the sponsor is actually getting something in return. There is reciprocity. For example, working with a newcomer reminds the sponsor of how much she has changed since she was a new person in Al-Anon. This reminder can encourage her to continue to work the program with her own sponsor. As the relationship continues, they both share more and more with each other and a friendship can form. The sponsee can offer new perspectives, too. This leads to developmental benefits for both as “the interchange between Sponsor and sponsored is a form of communication that will nourish both of you” (Al-Anon Family Groups, 2000).

As the sponsor guides the sponsee through the steps, she revisits the steps as well. Sharing their stories and experiences with the steps helps them both to learn from each other and grow. The two may also help each other grow spiritually. They may have different faiths or alternative ways to experience the spiritual aspect of the program. One may suggest new ways to meditate or alternative ways to discover a higher power. Neither is an expert and both are trying to better themselves and grow spiritually. Another way they can help each other is by

encouraging each other to be of service to their group, district, and beyond. One may be more comfortable at this than the other. Lastly, there may be benefits that are not program related. Some examples are a sponsee may help a sponsor learn new technology or the two may become travel buddies. As with friendships, the benefits can vary. A deeper discussion of the costs and benefits of sponsorship will occur a little later in this chapter.

The third core attribute is consistent and regular contact. Regular contact is generally needed more at the beginning of the relationship especially if the sponsee is new to Al-Anon. Some sponsors have a scheduled time that their sponsees call each week and others meet their sponsees regularly. The impetus is on the sponsees and it is their responsibility to reach out to their sponsors. The sponsee has to also understand that her sponsor has a life and will not always be there for the sponsee. Although a sponsor does all she can to be there for the sponsee, at times she cannot. For this reason most sponsors encourage their sponsees to have other Al-Anon friends or at least numbers of other Al-Anon members to whom they can reach out should they need to speak with someone and their sponsor is not available.

Formal vs. informal mentorship. Mentoring relationships can be classified as formal or informal. The main difference between the two is how the relationship was formed (Allen & Eby, 2003; Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). In formal mentoring, an outsider matched the mentor and protégé together. In a work environment, there may be incentives to those who participate in an established mentor program. Usually a formal mentor program lasts for a shorter time period, six months to a year, than an informal one, which often lasts from three to six years (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). There are usually goals that are stated from the beginning that the two work towards. When the goals or goal is met, the formal

mentoring relationship ends. It tends to be a transactional relationship, with the protégé paying the mentor for services. An informal mentoring relationship is established when a mentor and a protégé agree to work together without an outside person or organization connecting them together. The impetus could be from the mentor who sees something special in the protégé or it could stem from the protégé's interest in the mentor's work. In either case, the relationship forms over time and goals are continually formed, worked toward, met, and formed again. Goals tend to become common for both of them and the relationship becomes mutually beneficial.

In Al-Anon formal and informal sponsoring do not exist. However, there are a few aspects of the relationship to examine instead. The first is a temporary sponsor and the other is a service sponsor. Temporary sponsors can be used while trying to decide whom to pick to be a sponsor. Some groups assign newcomers a temporary sponsor that they can ask questions of and call until they choose their own sponsor. Temporary sponsors are used more as practice sponsors. The sponsee is temporarily working with a sponsor to see if it works. The sponsee learns more about what she is looking for by working with this temporary sponsor. If the relationship works and there is a good fit, the temporary sponsor can become her sponsor. If the relationship is not working, the sponsee can look for a new sponsor. In this temporary relationship there is not the same level of commitment as it is only temporary. A temporary sponsor can also be used if a sponsee needs support in doing something her sponsor has no experience with or if the sponsor is unavailable for some reason, such as illness or travel. For example, a friend of mine had to live in another state for months for job training. She found a temporary sponsor local to the area in which she was living to help guide her while she was there.

There are actually two types of sponsorship, a personal sponsor and a service sponsor. The personal sponsor is what has been written about to this point. The word sponsor is used to signify a personal sponsor. Members in Al-Anon who have a sponsor have a personal sponsor. Some choose to get a second sponsor to act as a service sponsor. Service sponsors are less common in Al-Anon. The service sponsor's role is primarily in encouraging their sponsees to volunteer or be of service at conferences, and at the group, district, or regional levels.

Characteristics of an ideal mentor. In general, mentors and protégés tend to choose to work best with those who are similar to them. When we are in relationship with those who are similar to ourselves, it validates who we are. In a mentoring relationship, we can identify the struggles and triumphs of those like us because we can imagine ourselves in the same situation feeling the same way. We can then better hear their suggestions to make improvements in ourselves.

Allen and Poteet (1999) found that mentors that had a wide range of skills and knowledge were more desirable. In addition, they found that the most important qualities were the ability to listen and communicate well, have patience, know the industry in which they work, and the ability to read and understand others. Erdem and Aytemur (2008) found that trust is a key component of a mentoring relationship and that part of trust was being consistent and fair.

Mentors and protégés work best with those who have the same attachment levels. It works best when they both feel equally secure in their relationship and how they feel about it. With their study on perceived similarity of mentors and protégés and how they view themselves in these relationships, Mitchell, Eby, and Ragins (2015), looked at attachment orientation (how securely people attach themselves to others) of mentors and protégés and found that it mattered

more if both the protégé and mentor had the same attachment levels rather than their actual level of security. Mentors and protégés who both equally had difficulty attaching to others, worked well together as did those who both securely attached to others. Both of these types of dyads worked better together than those where one attached securely and the other did not. How people relate and connect with others matters in a mentoring relationship. It works better if the two relate and connect with the same level of comfort and security.

Protégés see something in the mentor that they want for themselves and strive to emulate the qualities they perceive in the mentor. Mentors try to recreate themselves in their protégés. Allen and Eby (2003), in their study on mentoring relationships found that “perceived similarity related significantly to mentorship quality” (p. 478). Mentors in relationships with protégés similar to themselves reported having a higher quality relationship. According to Mitchell et al. (2015), “we are attracted to those who are similar to ourselves because they reinforce and validate our beliefs, attitudes, and behavior” (p. 2). People want to work with people who make them feel good about themselves. It is easier to get along with someone that you perceive to be similar to yourself as you believe that you understand what makes them tick and how to relate to them because you know what works for yourself. Working with someone who is similar shows the protégé that what she is doing is working and can lead to the success her mentor has.

Connectivity is how connected each is to the organization. Baranik et al. (2010) reasoned that a protégé who is in a formal mentoring relationship with a mentor who is committed to an organization would be more likely to commit to the organization as well. If the protégé feels cared for by the mentor, she may also feel cared for by the organization. Godshalk and Sosik (2000) added that formal mentors help transfer the culture of an organization to the protégé.

According to the Al-Anon Family Groups (2000) pamphlet, *Sponsorship, What It's All About*, "experience has shown that there is no *one* best technique to sponsorship" (p. 9).

Characteristics of an ideal sponsor would depend on the sponsee. This topic could be a research study on its own. That being said there are some characteristics that are common to most sponsors. In general, sponsors are willing and able to spend time with their sponsees. They ought to have their own sponsor, to have worked the steps with their sponsor, and continue to work on their own recovery. They are respectful, trusting, encouraging, and open-minded listeners.

Al-Anon Family Groups, Inc. (1992) explains:

Being a sponsor is as much a commitment to me as it is to someone else. It is not a favor. Sponsorship gives me a chance to share intimately, to care, to practice detaching with love, and to apply the Al-Anon principles more consciously than ever. And if I listen to my own words, I find that I usually tell those whom I sponsor exactly what I myself need to hear. (p. 179)

Each Al-Anon member who has sought the help and guidance of a sponsor has their own idea of what they are looking for. Some seek a nurturing and empathetic listener, someone who will ease them through the steps and the program. Others crave structure and look for someone who will be more of a drill sergeant telling them how to get through the program. There are sponsors of both these types and everything in between and each relationship is unique.

Phases of mentoring relationships. Kram (1983) in her foundational work on mentoring outlined four phases of the mentoring relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. As you may expect, the initiation phase is when the mentor and protégé are getting to know each other within the first six to 12 months. They develop goals and expectations of each other. The second phase, cultivation, is when the relationship matures and the highest level of psychosocial support is given and usually takes place within two to five years of the

relationship. In the separation phase the protégé becomes more independent and transitions away from the support of the mentor. In the redefinition phase the relationship changes and may become more of a friendship than a mentoring relationship. Kram (1983) suggested time frames for each of the phases but other researchers like Mullen (1994) stated,

time may not be a useful way of defining the phases. These phases are distinguished, in part, by differences in certainty about the terms of the relationship, differences in level of activity or interaction, and both mentor and protégé expectations. (p. 268)

In other words, each relationship is different and it is difficult to say exactly how long each phase will last for each relationship. Kram's (1983) time frames are helpful as a guide but should not be the only determining factor in deciding what phase a relationship is in. An interesting side note is that formal mentoring relationships usually last from six to 12 months (Ragins & Cotton, 1999) and therefore would be less likely to transition into the cultivation phase that Kram suggests. As noted earlier, the cultivation phase is when the magic happens. This is the time when the relationship flourishes and the most psychosocial support is seen. Because formal relationships may not last long enough to enter into this phase, it is evidence as to why informal mentoring seems to develop into more helpful and supportive relationships than occurs in formal mentoring.

Using Kram's (1983) four phases of the mentoring relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition, as a reference point many similarities in sponsorship can be found. In the initiation phase, the sponsor and sponsee are getting to know each other. They are beginning the step work. At this phase, the sponsor is the guide. She leads her sponsee and shows how she worked the first steps. She shares her own experience, strength, and hope with her

sponsee. The two regularly meet by phone or in person. The two begin to develop trust in each other.

In the cultivation phase, the two are getting to know each other even better and the relationship deepens. They have progressed through more or all of the steps. The sponsee has shared her deepest darkest secrets with her sponsor and her sponsor has shown her unconditional love and even shared some of her own secrets. The sponsor has encouraged the sponsee to take service commitments at group meetings. The sponsee is following the guidance of her sponsor. She is seeing that the work she is doing is working whether the drinker in her life is still drinking or not. She is feeling more serene. Other members are connecting more with her. She is feeling fairly confident with the program. This phase is where most of the relationships stay for years and years. From this phase, the sponsee can either transition to the separation phase or to the redefinition phase. These are different phases and not everyone goes through both.

In the redefinition phase, the sponsor and sponsee still care deeply and support each other. The sponsee begins to spread her wings more. She has her own sponsees and has begun the process with them. She still checks in with her sponsor but not as regularly as she once did. She has many Al-Anon friends that know her well and also support and guide her. Her sponsor still remains a special person and their relationship is more balanced. There is sharing by both. They learn from each other. It is a special friendship. “Most relationships between sponsor and sponsored turn into friendships that do not really end at any definite point. A successful sponsor relationship creates a bond, remembered gratefully on both sides, even if the two are no longer close” (Al-Anon Family Groups, 2000, p. 11).

After working the steps with their sponsor and being in the program for a while, some members decide they are better and no longer need the program. In this, the separation phase, the sponsee may begin to pull away. They may skip meetings or stop checking in with their sponsor. They no longer feel the need to attend meetings as frequently. They are separating from the program. They disconnect and eventually stop coming altogether. Some will continue to call their sponsor occasionally but technically they are no longer apart of Al-Anon. Often the calls stop too and they lose touch with the program and their sponsor. Sometimes the relationship is outgrown and the sponsee may fire the sponsor and find another sponsor who is a better fit.

Perceived costs and benefits of mentoring. As in most relationships, both mentors and protégés can experience positive and negative outcomes. For protégés the benefits may seem obvious; they gain the support, wisdom, and expertise of someone with more experience. They can learn from the mistakes of their mentor. They can share what is going on with them and get advice from the mentor. The mentor can act as a guide, teacher, and confidant. In some organizations and in academia, having a mentor choose a person to be a protégé is a significant step in the protégé development. It is a stamp of approval that signals that this person is someone to watch for advancement (Erdem & Aytemur, 2008) and leads to privileges she may not have received outside of the mentoring relationship. Protégés report having higher job satisfaction, more access to promotions, and a greater sense of belonging to an organization than those who are not mentored (Mullen, 1994). On the flip side, a protégé may be stuck with a mentor she does not like or who did not want to be a mentor. Some mentors choose to be mentors so they can gain wisdom from the less experienced person especially if the protégé is more adept at skills like using technology. In these cases the protégé who goes into a relationship thinking she will

gain from the wisdom of the more experienced person ends up giving up what she knows and not gaining much at all. She then feels isolated (Erdem & Aytemur, 2008). Unfortunately, some mentors use protégés to do the tedium of work in the service of their projects.

Mentors can gain internal/personal satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment (Dondero, 1997), a fresh perspective, a rejuvenation of their career and loyalty from their protégés (Ragins & Scandura, 1994). On the other hand, protégés can be needy and mentors may spend lots of time and energy on assisting them. If she has a protégé who is a poor performer, it may reflect badly on the mentor. Alternatively, the protégé may outperform her and take her job.

“By helping others, sponsors find they help themselves” (Al-Anon Family Groups, 2000, p. 11). This is a difficult topic to write about. In most of the Al-Anon literature, it says sponsorship helps both the sponsor and sponsored and the rewards are immeasurable. However, it does not explain what these rewards are. The descriptions are very generalized. Perhaps this is because rewards vary so much by person.

In *How Al-Anon Works* (Al-Anon Family Groups, 2008), sponsorship is described as a “mutually beneficial relationship. It allows sponsors to focus on the Al-Anon principles in a new way and provides them an opportunity to practice the Twelfth Step” (p. 37). Focusing on the principles (the knowledge gained in Al-Anon), and practicing the 12th step (carrying the message of Al-Anon to others) with a sponsee instead of a relative or close friend is different, hence the new ways. The benefit is being able to apply what you have learned to a new situation.

The biggest benefit is watching and helping someone learn the program and seeing him grow and get better because of it. Many newcomers come into the program angry and sad. After a year or two or more, they change. They lighten up; they grasp the program, and share what life

in recovery is like for them. Being a sponsor and being a part of the transformation would be rewarding for the sponsor. Other benefits are meeting and working with new people and getting to know people intimately.

The biggest cost to the sponsor is time. Some sponsees are needy and ask for a lot of time and attention. Having found someone that finally understands what they are going through and who will listen is comforting. Calls or texts to a sponsor allow the sponsee to trust in the relationship. Calling or texting too frequently can be burdensome for the sponsor.

Theories. Three theories applicable to the mentoring relationship rose to the surface of the research: social exchange theory/ leader-member exchange theory, transformational leadership theory, and relational cultural theory. Social exchange theory is a transactional theory whereby there is a series of transactions that take place between members. This theory proposes that how individuals relate in any relationship is based on a series of exchanges. How we feel about the relationship centers on the fairness of these exchanges. Baranik et al. (2010) added, “social exchange theory rests on the assertion that individuals develop, maintain and exit relationships based on their perceived costs and benefits” (p. 367). In a mentoring relationship, both parties give and receive different things, but in order for the relationship to be successful, both the mentor and protégé have to feel they are getting and giving their fair share (Ensher & Murphy, 2011).

One form of social exchange theory is Leader-Member exchange theory (LMX). For this theory to apply to mentoring, there would have to be agreement that mentoring is a form of leadership where the mentor is the leader and the protégé is the follower. Mentoring is a form of leadership. The mentor serves as a leader as she guides the protégé by giving career advice,

sharing the culture of the organization, and the like. However, the mentoring relationship can also progress to the point where it becomes more reciprocal and more of a friendship over time. At that point, the leadership aspect would dissolve or leadership may be shared. The mentor may learn from the protégé. Given that mentoring is a form of leadership, an examination of LMX and its application to mentoring will follow.

In the beginning stage of LMX the leader and follower interact transactionally. They are strangers at this point. As they are just getting to know each other, their exchanges are not personal. They tend to be more along the lines of the protégé following the leader's directions. The protégé/follower has a job to do and does it. The follower does not give much input. As they move into the second stage, they become acquaintances. The follower learns more about her role in the relationship and more social exchanges begin to occur as they get to know each other better. In this stage mutual trust is being built. In stage three the relationship has reached maturity and is more reciprocal. Leader and follower are loyal to each other. The relationship is more like that of peers than leader-follower at this stage. However, some dyads never progress to the mature stage. Some stay in the first stage for various reasons, they may not like each other, they may have too many other things needing their attention, and they may not buy into the benefits of mentoring.

These stages fit closely with Kram's (1983) four phases of mentoring that were written about earlier in this paper: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. LMX's stage one and Kram's initiation phase are similar (see Table 2.1). In both, the dyads are relative strangers and starting to get to know each other. Their interactions are more formalized. The leader or mentor asks the follower or protégé to do something and generally they comply. It is a

transactional relationship at this point. Cultivation and stage two are moving to a closer connection. The dyads are building trust and loyalty. From this stage there is a little jump in both LMX and the phases of mentoring. This is the time when the followers (and protégés) begin to fly on their own with the trust and support from their leaders (and mentors). In Kram's phases the protégé separates from the mentor and then the relationship becomes more of a friendship. In LMX there is not a separation stage but there is a point where the leader provides less direction and gives her follower more autonomy. This leads to more faith in her abilities on the part of the protégé and knowing she is doing what is in the best interest for their relationship and the organization. Leading to Kram's redefinition and LMX stage three, the dyads have reached a new level of peer status or even friendship.

Table 2.1

Four Phases of Mentoring

	Kram's Four Phases of Mentoring (Kram, 1983)	Leader-Member Exchange (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)
Dyads are strangers and getting to know each other. Interactions are transactional.	Initiation	Stage 1
Trust and loyalty are being built	Cultivation	Stage 2
The follower becomes more autonomous. Does not rely on the leader as much	Separation	
Mature level of relationship. Have become more like peers or friends	Redefinition	Stage 3

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) in their work on LMX summed it up by saying "the centroid concept of the theory is that effective leadership processes occur when leaders and followers are

able to develop mature leadership relationships (partnerships) and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring” (p. 225). Mentoring relationships are effective when mentor and protégé are able to develop mature relationships (partnerships) and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring.

Social Exchange theory postulates that relationships are built around a series of exchanges. Each gives and takes from the relationship. The same holds true in sponsorship. The two build trust based on previous experiences. As the relationship grows the more detailed and varied the exchanges become; both benefit from the exchanges. LMX works similarly in sponsorship as it does in mentoring. As mentioned LMX fits the phases of Kram’s (1983) work and sponsorship fits with Kram’s work. Therefore, LMX fits the phases of sponsorship. One interesting idea that LMX adds to the sponsor-sponsee relationship is that the sponsor in this application would be considered a leader. In the beginning stages she is more directive in her approach but as the relationship matures, the sponsee (or follower) needs guidance less as she has internalized the guidance from the leader. When writing about the last stage, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) explained, “the relationship becomes more like peers. . . . Moreover, because of their special relationship, the partners have the resources and support that allow them to take on additional responsibilities within the organization” (p. 233). In this case, the sponsee takes on more responsibilities for her own recovery, is volunteering more within her group, and taking on sponsees. In order to learn more about how these theories relate and apply to sponsorship, a thorough investigation would need to be undertaken.

Another form of leadership theory found in the mentoring research is transformational leadership. As the name implies, the protégé is transformed in this mentoring relationship.

Godshalk and Sosik (2000) made a few distinctions between leadership and mentoring saying, “Leadership may be a more formal, overt, and direct influence process, whereas mentoring may be a more informal, subtle, and indirect influence process” (p. 294); both promote change. They continued by adding that mentors are transfer agents of the organizational culture. They build trust in their protégés, help them develop, promote their independence and critical thinking, and inspire and motivate them.

Transformational leadership can be seen in sponsoring relationships as well. Sponsors guide sponsees through the steps, and encourage them to participate through service and sharing at meetings. Working with the sponsor helps the sponsee transform in recovery. She is taught through the serenity prayer to “accept the things she cannot change, and change the things she can.” Al-Anon members come into Al-Anon focused on the alcoholic in their life often to the detriment to themselves. They are so focused on the other that they have neglected themselves. The transformative power of working the program shifts the focus from the alcoholic to herself. As one member shared in *Courage to Change*, “It is up to me to take my recovery seriously, to work on my attitudes, to take care of my mind, body, and spirit, to make amends when I have done harm-in short, to change the things I can” (Al-Anon Family Groups, 1992, p. 284). In this way she has transformed from thinking obsessively about the alcoholic and is instead focusing on where she can do some good, herself.

The third leadership theory found in the mentoring research is relational cultural theory (RCT). According to Comstock et al. (2008) one of the premises of RCT is that “healing takes place in the context of mutually empathic, growth-fostering relationships” (p. 279). Portman and Garrett (2005) agreed, “development occurs in growth-fostering relationships within specific

cultural contexts” (p. 287). In RCT the mentor and protégé connect within a certain cultural context, relate with each other, and both are changed because of their relationship together. Liu, Liu, Kwan, and Mao (2009) found that “Each party in a mentoring relationship contributes in some way to the growth, development, and empowerment of others” (p. 874). In RCT there is no hierarchy in the relationship. Both the protégé and mentor need to be vulnerable and interdependent in the relationship (Ragins, 2012). Ragins (2012) added, mentors “must have the emotional stability and self-awareness necessary to allow for mutual influence in the relationship; influence that is based on needs and abilities, rather than on hierarchically prescribed roles and traditional power relationships” (p. 6). In addition to mutual influence, RCT in the mentoring relationship encourages mutual empathy, mutual respect, and mutual empowerment (Portman & Garrett, 2005). In RCT, mentors and protégés are authentic to their sense of self. They are free to be who they are within the relationship.

Sponsorship in Al-Anon closely aligns with relational cultural theory. Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters (2000) describes sponsorship as “a mutual and confidential sharing between two Al-Anon or Alateen members. Sponsorship is for the newcomer—confused, anxious, uncertain—as well as for all members seeking to live this spiritual way of life” (p. 3) and “The interchange between Sponsor and sponsored is a form of communication that will nourish both of you. Indeed it may heighten the Sponsor’s own understanding of the program” (p. 11). Sponsorship is a mutually beneficial relationship set within the culture of Al-Anon. It is a “relationship of equals who are learning to value themselves” (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1992, p. 241). In this relationship sponsors and sponsees are open and honest with

each other. They help each other by listening and supporting each other. Each is encouraged to be herself and to share openly and honestly with each other.

Conclusion

In this chapter family systems and the ways in which family members are affected by the family disease of alcoholism were discussed. The various treatments including therapy and support groups followed. It was found that there is a greater need for help for the families that are suffering. One suggested source of help is Al-Anon. One important aspect of Al-Anon is the helping relationship of sponsorship. While there is very little research on sponsorship in Al-Anon, a similar relationship, mentorship, was thoroughly researched to find common themes and differences with the Al-Anon sponsorship.. At this time it is all conjecture based on the sharings of members in the literature and my own experience in AFG. This proposed study is an effort to more deeply understand the specific nature and characteristics of the Al-Anon sponsorship relationship.

Chapter three will include an examination of the epistemology of narrative inquiry, its relevance to the research question, and a description of the method of study. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Methodology/Guiding Questions and Research Procedures, Narrative Research, and Storytelling

Narrative research can paint an in-depth picture of an area being studied. It is like a snapshot of one individual or community and their story. Descriptive data can emerge from the interviewing process that would not be captured by experiments or questionnaires. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) gave a definition of narrative research as, “any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials” (p. 2). These authors also classified narrative work into three fields: studies in which the narrative is used for the investigation of any research question, studies that investigate the narrative as their research object, and studies on the philosophy and methodology of qualitative approaches to research and, among them, narrative research (p. 5). This dissertation focuses on the first, using the narrative to investigate a research question. In this case, the question is: What is the nature and quality of the sponsorship relationship as perceived by sponsors and sponsees? Data was gathered by conducting interviews. Through interviewing the participants, each person’s unique sponsorship story was told and then common themes and ideas of sponsorship were discussed. According to Moen (2006), there are three basic claims about narrative research: 1. People organize their experiences into stories, 2. The stories told also depend on context why and to whom are they being shared, and 3. Storytellers use different voices or perspectives when telling their stories (p. 4). These three ideas form the next three sections of this paper: stories, context, and perspective.

Stories

Stories are an integral part of Al-Anon. Even more basic than the use of narration in Al-Anon, Plummer (1995) claimed, “Part of being human involves narrating stories to ourselves

and to others” (as cited by Fraser, 2004, p. 180). Storytelling is foundational to communicating with others. “Story is central to human understanding—it makes life livable, because without a story, there is no identity, no self, no other” (p. 505). Moen (2006) reasoned that storytelling begins in childhood and continues through our adult lives as a way to recount and make sense of our experiences.

In Al-Anon when sharing stories that were once shameful and isolating, members are able to laugh at what they had gone through living with alcoholism. Al-Anon Family Groups (2007) pointed out, “Here we come to know that laughing together in spite of the darkness and pain we experienced is one of Al-Anon’s greatest healing effects. We laugh with each other not only because we think we’re funny . . . but because we recognize the many aspects of ourselves in each other” (p. 13). As a result of hearing other’s stories that are similar to their own, members no longer are silent and alone. Stories connect members to one another. Lewis (2011) confirmed, “Quite possibly, it [story] is the principal way of understanding the lived world” (p. 505). Stories play an important role in Al-Anon and in life.

Another aspect of storytelling in a community is that members begin to add the group ideas to their own story. Certain phrases are included that are part of the group vernacular. This phenomenon is called *group speak* and becomes part of a community narrative. Mankowski and Rappaport (2000) asserted:

Each participant integrates this community narrative into their own personal story. The community narrative then functions as the foundation for constructing internal changes to participants’ identities. The community narrative most often provides an alternative point of view from the dominant cultural narrative. At the same time, the community narrative itself is constructed and revised by publicly sharing the participants’ individual stories. (as cited by Kitamura, 2014, p. 97)

Swora (2002) and Humphreys (2000) both talk about the use of stories in Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.). After members have been in A.A. for a while they begin to use the shared language of the community. The stories create the community of A.A. and the community helps shape the stories. Cain (1991) added:

The drunk-a-logs of A.A. members become more and more similar to those reported in The Big Book, and more and more exemplify the ideology of A.A. This process of construction brings the member's life story more fully into harmony with the A.A. community narrative, and is one of the more dramatic examples of how a community-level phenomenon (the A.A. narrative) influences individual-level phenomenon (a member's life story) in mutual help groups. (as cited by Humphreys, 2000, p. 49)

Al-Anon, like A.A., has similar influences on individuals' stories. A counterargument would be that the stories do not change to reflect the ideology of the program but rather a member has learned to converse in the shared vernacular. My own story is a reflection of the power of community narratives. As a member, in my story, I felt like I was a victim of circumstance my whole life. After being in the program for several years, I learned that I had choices about how I felt in each of the situations I had been in at the time and even more importantly now. I could continue to be a victim or I could flip it around and move forward. Telling my story now is much different than telling it four years ago. The terms and phrases I learned in Al-Anon helped me to explain the choices I was making and allowed me to become a part of the group.

Context

The stories people tell are largely determined by who they are telling them to and in what context. The context can be broken down into two parts the culture of where the storytelling or story takes place and the relationship of the story to the listeners. These two influencing factors are not mutually exclusive and share some connections as well.

Culture. According to Tylor (1974), the founder of cultural anthropology, culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 1). Narrative researchers have described a vast array of cultures seen from the LGBTQ youth theater scene (Halverson, 2008) to prison populations (Farrant, 2014); from schools (Georgakopoulou, 2013; Lewis, 2011; Moen, 2006) to A.A. (Humphreys, 2000; Swora, 2002) and other support groups (East, Jackson, O'Brien, & Peters, 2010; Kitamura, 2014). There is talk of the dominant culture (Farrant, 2014; Kitamura, 2014), popular culture (Farrant, 2014), and even media culture (Georgakopoulou, 2013; Stockburger, 2008).

Understanding the cultures of a person helps to understand the individual better. It provides normality to the context of the story. Once you understand the cultural background, you can better understand what sets the person apart from the culture, what makes the person a unique individual (Geertz, 1973). When talking about a person's story, Farrant (2014) added:

Individuals appropriate meaning from culture in the form of important attachments to people, events, valued objects, environments, and orientations to our bodies through embodied identity. To interpret intertextually is to bring out the complex embeddedness of a narrative's meaning within its specific cultural context. (p. 481)

Both culture and identity are embedded within all our actions, thoughts, and speech. To separate the culture from the story is a complex endeavor because they are so connected. Moen (2006) would agree, "A life told is a narrative or several narratives influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience, and by the social context" (p. 7).

Each person or group of people involved in a conversation or sharing a story has their own background and culture. While it can be a daunting task to determine the cultural aspects of

the story, storyteller, or listener, it would lessen the impact of the experience if it were not included. Meaning may be missed or misinterpreted. Culture is part of each person's story:

When we acknowledge that the explicit content, structure, and implications in a narrative are inextricably entwined with what goes on before, during, and after it, we must honor narrating as a cultural tool whose working parts require detailed examination. It takes cultures a long time to create their devices, like marking intensity, focus, and minimalizations, for doing things with language, so we can use them as keys to reading what is especially significant to the narrator. (Daiute, 2011, p. 335)

Culture is embedded in each story told and is part of a person's identity. To fully understand a person, you have to understand their background and culture (Gergen & Gergen, 2011).

Relationship to the listener. Lieblich et al. (1998) wrote, "The story *is* one's identity, a story created, told, and retold throughout life. We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell" (p. 7). When we tell our stories, someone is listening. The people we are talking to often determine what we tell. Likewise, Lannamann and McNamee (2011) observed, "A speaker doesn't know what meaning has been created until the other responds and the entire interaction is not complete until the original speaker responds to the response" (p. 386). In everyday interactions two or more people are needed to create meaning in what is being said. Moen (2006) would add, "The voice producing the utterance considers or reflects the person or persons to whom the utterance is addressed" (p. 3). Similarly Smorti (2011) wrote, "words, memories undergo profound change when they are transformed from inner thought into a narrative form, because these must conform to the constraints imposed by the social context and by language structure and usage" (p. 305). Stories are in some sense alive. They are constantly evolving and changing based on the experiences and perceptions of the speaker and the listener. The telling of the story is shaped by the interpersonal demands and limitations in the relationship.

Perspective. The perspective of the storyteller is revealed in the way she uses her voice or how she weaves past, present and future into one story. Moen (2006) wrote, “The process of claiming voice is therefore basically an interaction between the individual’s beliefs and experiences and past, present and future external voices” (p. 5). Kitamura (2014) found that people use differing speech patterns when speaking of their current or past self or when referring to other people. Their speech patterns change based on new perspectives and situations.

Halverson (2008) used social identity theory to explain this pluralism people often operate within. He wrote, we are “actively working with the way we see ourselves (ego), the way others see us (personal), and the way we fit into the various communities to which we belong (social)” (p. 31). Lastly, Bruner (2002) explained, our old stories become “out-of-date” and need to change to align with ‘new circumstances, new friends, new enterprises’ ” (p. 65).

People are complicated. We each have our own history of experience, thoughts, biases, and so much more that determines our perspective. These perspectives can shift when we are with different groups or people. Our way of speaking even changes when we are with different people because we have assimilated with that group. As Bruner (2002) wrote, “however much we may rely on a functioning brain to achieve our self-hood, we are virtually from the start expressions of a culture that nourishes us” (p. 87). Therefore it is not surprising that what we say or how we say it changes based on whom we are speaking with and where we are speaking. When analyzing narrative data, a researcher must attend to the immediate context of the interview relationship. Observed contextual/relational constraints may provide additional information about the story being narrated. In this study, the participants told stories of their

Al-Anon and sponsorship experiences to me the researcher. I created a context that was different from sponsorship and thus the story itself would evolve and change with me.

In this section narrative research is examined and the reasoning for the method of storytelling was explained. Moen's (2006) structural ideas of narrative research were used to confirm that each story has context, story, and perspective. The context of a story includes the culture of the speaker, the listener, and the community or location of where the story takes place or is told. Culture is deeply embedded in each person and makes up part of the individual. To understand the context of the story, understanding the cultural underpinnings at play is essential. Connected to this idea is the relationship of the listener to the speaker. This relationship shapes the stories that are told and how the stories are interpreted. Lastly, often storytellers use different voices or speech patterns to distinguish different ways of seeing themselves and others.

There has not been a study of sponsorship in Al-Anon prior to my work. The relationship of sponsor and sponsee in Al-Anon is powerful but it is also ordinary within the context of Al-Anon. In my knowledge no one has sought to understand it or to illuminate the process or to share it with others outside of the Al-Anon program. With this research study I uncover the significance of this special but ordinary relationship in the family's journey to recovery. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge about the relationship between sponsor and sponsee in Al-Anon.

Method of Study

In this section I discuss how I collected, analyzed, and interpreted data in this study. Lieblich et al. (1998) matrix of analytic focus—holistic-content, categorical-content, holistic-form, and categorical-form—guided my choice of narrative analysis.

Participants. It is unknown how many Al-Anon members there are worldwide. There are 25,400 autonomous Al-Anon/Alateen groups in more than 130 countries (<http://www.al-anon.org/>). Everyone in Al-Anon has a story to tell. There is validity in studying a wide cross section of members from newcomers to people with 50+ years in the program. The scope of that project would be monumental. For the purpose of this research project, I limited my study to men and women who have been in the program for more than ten years, have worked with a sponsor for at least eight of those years, and have worked with at least one sponsee for a year or more. In this way, I spoke with people who have experience being both a sponsor and a sponsee.

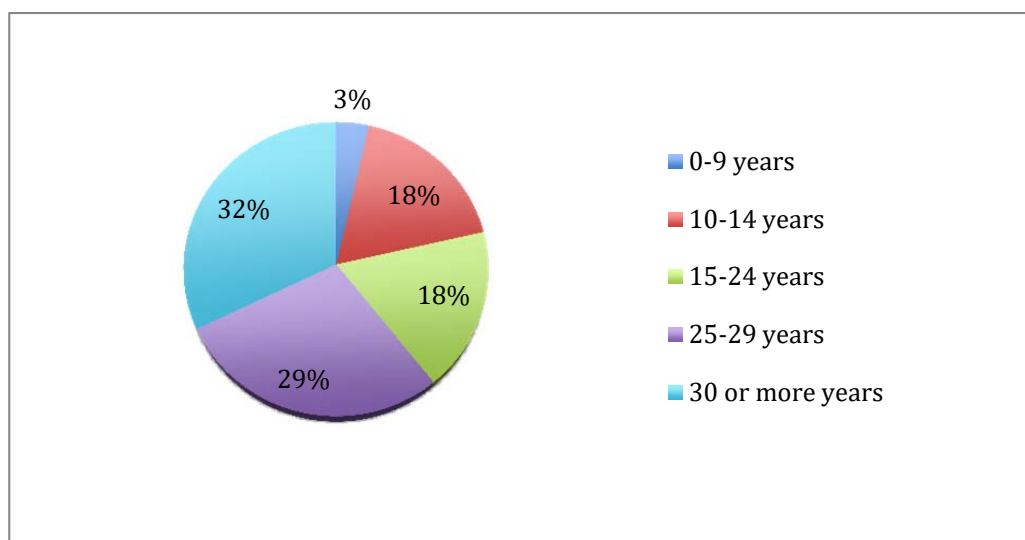


Figure 3.1. Time in Al-Anon.

Figure 3.1 Time in Al-Anon, shows that the majority of respondents had more than ten years in the program of Al-Anon. One had fewer than ten years and was not included in the study. It is significant to note that over 60% of the respondents had more than 25 years in the program.

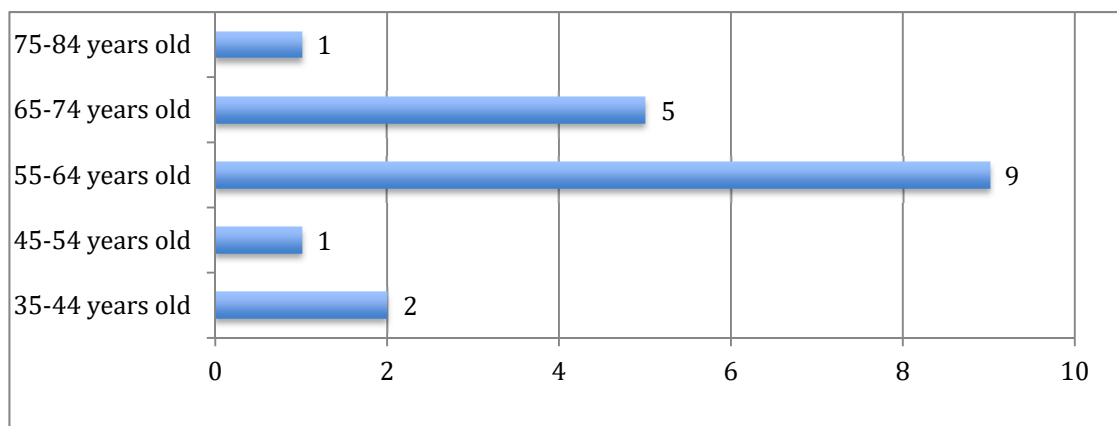


Figure 3.2. Age of participants.

I sought to interview both men and women in Al-Anon. Of the 29 participants, 22 were female and six were men. According to the 2015 Al-Anon Membership Study, 83% of Al-Anon members are female; the average age is 59.8 years; and 93% of members are white (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, n.d.c). My participants are representative of Al-Anon as a whole. Seventy-nine percent of my participants are female; the average age of my participants is 61 years (see Figure 3.2) and 89% of participants are white (see Figure 3.3). Of the 29 respondents, nine did not meet the criteria for the study and one was unwilling to do a phone interview and the distance to travel made it impossible to include him.

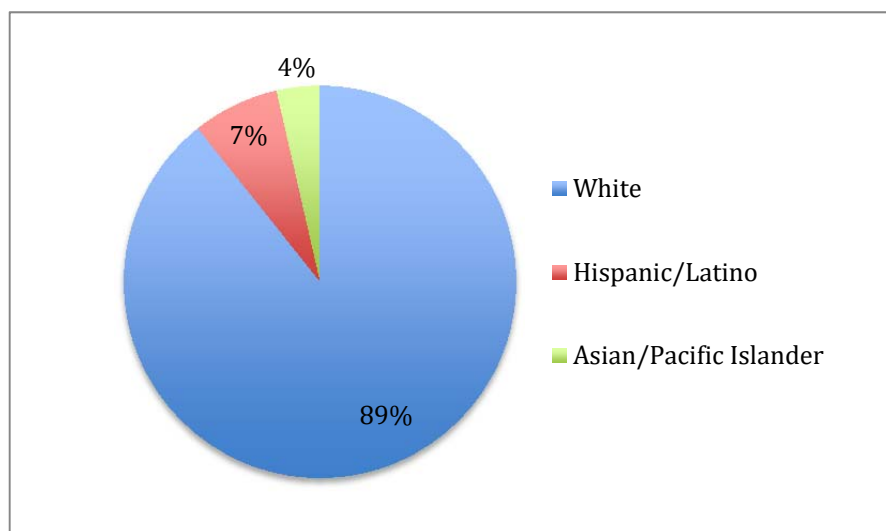


Figure 3.3 Ethnicity of participants.

The majority of my participants live in Southern California (see Figure 3.4). Two of the respondents are from other states and were left off of the map. Including them skewed the map too much for it to be useful.

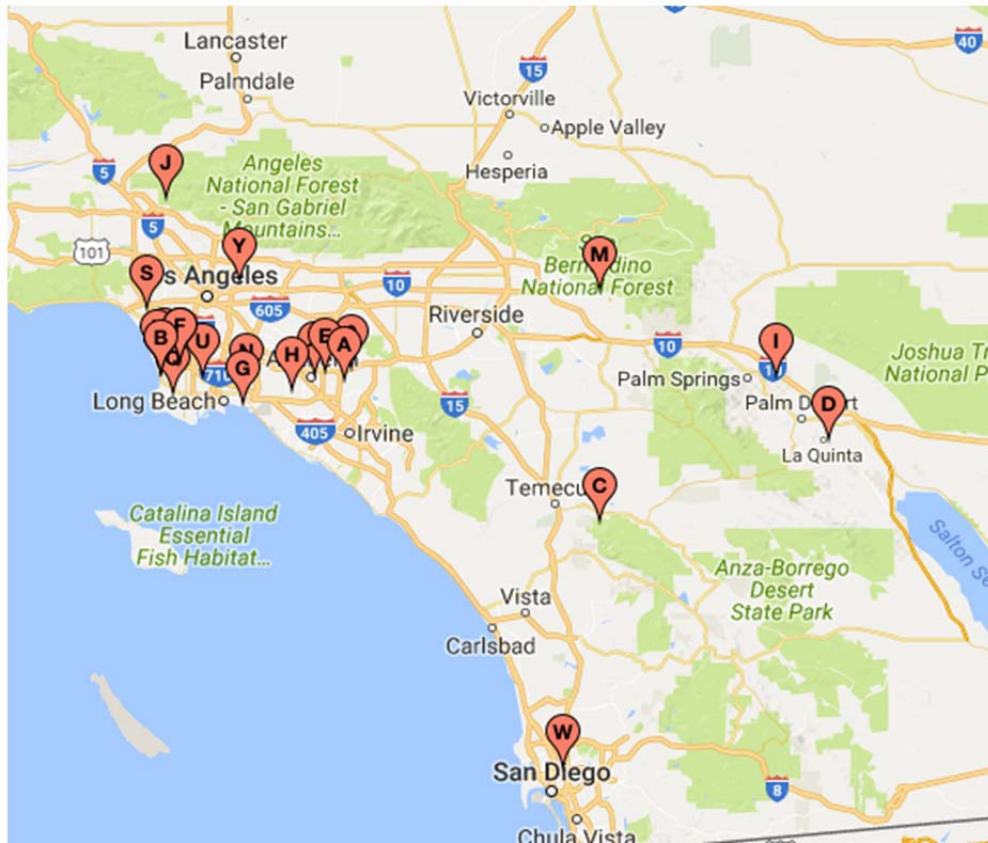


Figure 3.4. Map of respondents' locations. Adapted with permission from Geobatch Map

Each participant has had a sponsor for at least ten years (see Figure 3.5) and has at least one sponsee for five years or more (See Figure 3.6).

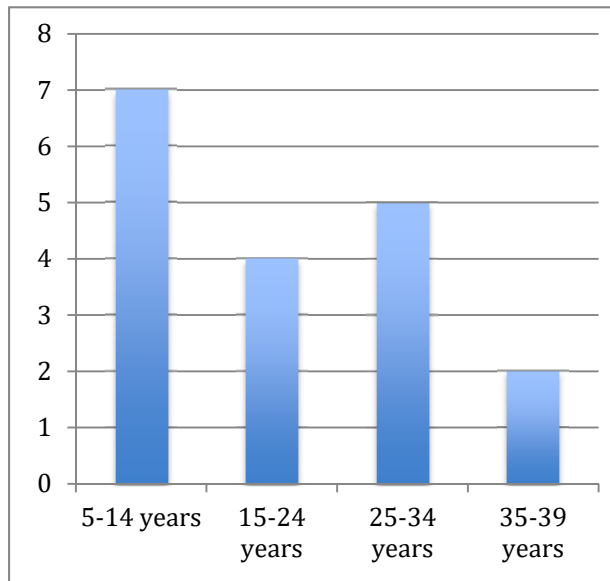


Figure 3.5. Years as a sponsee.

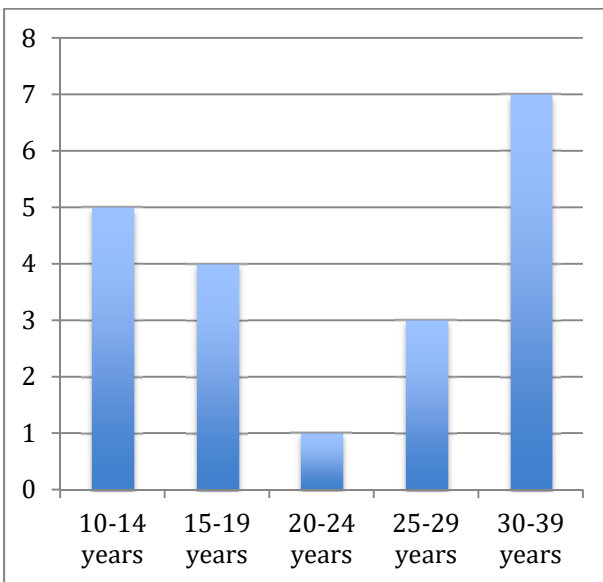


Figure 3.6. Years as a sponsor.

Data Collection

I interviewed 19 members of Al-Anon. The majority of participants were from southern California. I stopped interviewing people when I felt I had reached enough rich textual details to describe sponsorship in depth. I originally reached out to the World Service Office (WSO) of Al-Anon. The WSO is the headquarters of the entire Al-Anon fellowship. One small section of the WSO is the WSO Policy Committee. According to the Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual, the function of this committee is to, “consider problems or projects brought to its attention by any Al-Anon or Alateen member. Its statements of policy, based on our traditions, are subject to the approval of the Board of Trustees and the World Service Conference” (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 2013, p. 137). They were interested in my project and preliminarily agreed to assist in the quest for participants. However, once the project went through committee approval process, they decided the project would work better locally. My contact at the WSO sent my proposal to the Delegate and Cooperating with the Professional Community (CPC) Coordinator of the Southern California World Service. The two women with whom she put me in contact helped elicit participants by sending emails to Al-Anon members they knew. Included in the email was a description of the study, my criteria for including participants in the study, and the approved ethics application from Antioch University’s Institutional Review Board. The potential participants then sent me an email stating that they wanted to participate in the study. Once I received these emails from potential participants, I sent them an email with a description of the study, informed consent as outlined and in compliance with my approved ethics application, and a brief Participant Survey for them to fill out. The Participant Survey (see Appendix F) asked demographic questions, questions about their time in Al-Anon, and questions about their

experience with sponsorship. As soon as I received each participant's survey results, I contacted them and scheduled an interview. I interviewed nineteen participants and stopped when themes began to be repeated. All others who contacted me after this point were thanked for their willingness to participate and will receive an executive summary of the findings describing the nature and quality of the relationship.

Interviews. Like many researchers before me I chose to use interviews to gather data. Fraser (2004) claims,

We use them (interviews) not only because we wish to delve beneath statistically driven generalizations that are made but also because they have the potential to validate the knowledge of 'ordinary' people, especially 'ordinary' women who are liable to be omitted from many research projects. (p. 184)

I interviewed each person telephonically. I continued to interview new participants until no new concepts emerged from the interview analysis. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and one hour and ten minutes. They were recorded in an mp3 format. I asked each participant about his or her sponsorship story. Throughout the interviews, I asked the participants to give specific examples to help illustrate what they shared with me.

Transcription. I hired a transcriptionist that was familiar with the process and was recommended by an Antioch University faculty member to do the transcribing. Each participant's name was replaced with a code such as A for participant 1. Any other names used by the participant (such as her sponsor, spouse, or child) were changed to "my sponsor," "my spouse," "my child," or left out when I reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy and anonymity. Other identifying information such as their city was removed.

Analyzing and Interpreting Data

Lieblich et al. (1998) found that first a decision must be made as to the unit of analysis. In a categorical approach, analysis can be made on short sections of a text where categories are studied or the text as a whole can be analyzed using a holistic approach. The second decision is whether to study the content of the text or the form or structure of the text. Therefore using these two dimensions, four types of analysis can be seen: holistic-content, categorical-content, holistic-form, and categorical-form. The authors continued to say that in some studies it is difficult to distinguish form from content and in others, the parts from the whole. In other words, there is a continuum of each dimension of analysis and it is up to the researcher to determine what fits best for her research. I will briefly look at each of these approaches to analysis.

Holistic-Content. In the holistic-content approach to analyzing narrative texts, the researcher looks at the overall content of the whole narrative text. The researcher reads through the narrative text in its entirety several times until patterns emerge. Lieblich et al. (1998) encouraged researchers to, “Believe in your ability to detect the meaning of the text, and it will ‘speak’ to you” (p. 62). These insights are subjective but they become the basis of the study. As the work progresses the researcher will explain and describe the meaning of the parts that speak to her. In the next step, notes about the themes or ideas that were generated are jotted down. Anything that seems important or stands out for any reason is noted. Next the notes are reviewed and themes are determined. What has been repeated throughout the story? What ideas are described or talked about at length? Once the themes are determined a new reading of the text is done highlighting each theme in different colors. Lastly a discussion is given on the themes and how they apply within the narrative text.

Holistic-Form. In this approach the whole narrative text is used once again. However, instead of looking at the content, the structure of the text is what is analyzed. It is thought that the structure of the narrative can give insight into the storyteller. It can show how storytellers weave their lives into plots, much like the plots in books and theater. It is no surprise then that those who use a holistic-form approach would use several of the same distinctions as used in literary criticism: narrative typology (comedy, tragedy, romance, and satire), progression of the narrative (the development of the plot of the life story), and cohesiveness of the narrative or a well-structured story (Lieblich et al., 1998). In summary, the holistic-content approach focuses on how the story is told and without as much emphasis on the content of the story.

Categorical-Content. In the categorical-content approach, small sections of the narrative text are analyzed. There are many ways to do content analysis. Lieblich et al. (1998) delineated the steps most researchers use when following this approach:

1. Selection of the subtext. After deciding on a research question, the sections that relate to it are selected and put together. These are looked at not as part of the story as a whole but rather as individual sections.
2. Definition of the content categories. Themes that are seen across the various sections are chosen.
3. Sorting the materials into categories. Sentences, words or utterances are sorted into the themes that were chosen.
4. Drawing conclusions from the results. The results (utterances, words, and sentences) for each category are counted.

Categorical-Form. The categorical-form approach gives insight about the speaker that studying the content may not provide. This approach looks at the thought processes of the individuals by looking at small sections of the text. Spacing between words, overly descriptive sections, repeating of words and phrases, and other signifiers indicate there is something behind the words being said. This approach looks at what is not being said or the latent meaning of the story to fill in or explain what is being said.

Process of interview analysis. After reviewing each of these types of analysis, I chose to use the holistic-content approach. I allowed the data to speak to me. For my research, the focus is on what (content) is being said more than how (form) it was said. With this approach I sought to gain knowledge about the relationship between sponsor and sponsee in Al-Anon from the participants. In this holistic approach, I read and re-read the transcripts several times. Eventually, several themes were revealed as significant to the overall story of sponsorship. I again reread each transcript, making note of where each of the themes played out. I then clustered all of the sections from each transcript that dealt with the same theme together. Reading through these clusters allowed me to identify subthemes. The subthemes helped inform and support the main idea of the themes. When writing up the findings, I used excerpts from the interviews to illustrate the properties of the themes and subthemes as spoken by the participants. Finally using the thematic analysis, I was able to present a holistic interpretation of the quality and meaning of the sponsorship relationship in Al-Anon as was told to me through the interviews.

A Reflexive Posture

As I progressed in my work I tried to keep in mind that the stories that were told to me were merely one version of the many possible versions each person could tell. The choices each

person made as they told a story were based on the context of the event being shared or where they shared it. As I interviewed them, they chose stories based on their interaction with me. They made judgments about who I am and what I want to hear and possibly changed what they would have said in another situation. I do not know the other versions of the story. I analyzed and interpreted the stories I heard carefully and faithfully to the intent of the teller. Because of my background of being an Al-Anon member, in some cases I may have provided more detail and insight into what the participant was saying than an outside researcher would have been able to provide. The participants may have been more forthcoming because of this fact because they did not have to explain working the minutia of the program. We used shortcuts of common terminology that other researchers may not have been able to utilize. All of which helped us to co-construct meaning throughout the interviewing process. Through the stories shared with me, I was able to create a picture of what sponsorship in Al-Anon is like.

Ethical Considerations

I completed an ethics application with informed consent (Appendix G) for the people I interviewed. I did not conduct interviews at work or at any other organization so I did not need authorization from the organization. However, I was in contact with the Al-Anon Family Group World Service Office and they provided support for my project by helping me find participants from southern California to interview. Each participant received a full disclosure of the nature of the study, the risks, benefits and alternatives, with an extended opportunity to ask questions. I explained that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The confidential recordings and transcriptions were kept in a locked drawer of my desk and in a password protected file on my

computer. To keep the names of participants confidential, I changed all of the names used in the interviews and all other identifiers were removed.

Al-Anon is an anonymous program. The Al-Anon Service Manual has four pages dedicated to anonymity. Anonymity is written into the 12 Traditions. Al-Anon's Eleventh Tradition states, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV and films. We need to guard with special care the anonymity of all AA members and Al-Anon's Twelfth Tradition states, . . . Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities." Al-Anon Family Groups (2013) introduces the section on anonymity with:

The experience of our groups suggests that the principle of anonymity summed up in Tradition Twelve as "the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions"—has three elements: There is anonymity as it applies outside Al-Anon/Alateen, governing our contacts with general public, the media, and professionals; anonymity within the fellowship; and anonymity as it contributes to our personal growth. (p. 91)

Because of the traditions of anonymity within Al-Anon, it was imperative that I kept strict confidentiality and anonymity. I sought to explore the relationship of sponsors and sponsees in Al-Anon, which will expose the nature of the relationship to people outside of the program. This study was done with special care to the anonymity of all of the participants. I weighed the risk of revealing the experience of the relationship against the potential benefits that this study may offer. It may give counselors and therapists more background knowledge to better understand what takes place within this organization and within this relationship. It could potentially spread information about the benefits of Al-Anon and in particular sponsorship to people who may never have heard of it before. It could illuminate this special sponsorship relationship closely

aligned with traditional categories of mentorship or lay helpers. It could reach people who are in need of it. The only risks I am aware of are breaches of anonymity.

The WSO of Al-Anon has policies and guidelines that I had to adhere to do this work with their cooperation (see Appendix G). According to the policy, “scientific studies that document the effectiveness of Al-Anon as a recovery program could increase the credibility and perceived relevance of Al-Anon to a wider cross-section of people in need.” This study hopes to justify the effectiveness of Al-Anon and in particular the sponsorship relationship. The participants in this study did not report any misgivings or ill effects from engaging in the interview rather they expressed gratitude for being able to share their sponsorship stories with me and for including them in the study. Several expressed interest in hearing the final results of the study. Mostly the participants were happy to help spread the word about Al-Anon and how it has helped them in their lives.

Research Findings

Members of Al-Anon were asked to tell their sponsorship story. Nineteen men and women primarily in southern California shared their experience of being both a sponsee and a sponsor. Their stories were transcribed and analyzed. The purpose was to learn from their stories common characteristics of the sponsoring relationship. After repeated assurances of anonymity, the participants spoke freely of what sponsorship meant to them and how it has helped them in their recovery and in their lives. All but one person spoke very highly of the sponsoring relationship even though some participants had had negative experiences with a sponsor or sponsee.

Unfolding of Relationship

The data analysis provided four dominant topical themes that were found in the interviews. Each of these four themes was described as a phase of the relationship:

1. Starting the relationship,
2. Experiencing the relationship when it is going well,
3. Experiencing the relationship when it is not going well, and
4. Ending the relationship.

Each of the topical themes has various subthemes that give texture and meaning to each phase of sponsorship. The topical themes represent broad elements of relationship whereas the subthemes explore and uncover the unique meaning that the relationship has for participants of sponsorship. The excerpts from the interviews speak to the presence of these themes as experienced by individual sponsees and sponsors. Each participant is represented by a letter, A through S, to show distribution of the quotes used.

Starting the relationship. Each of the 19 participants spoke about starting a relationship with one or more sponsors. They shared stories of qualities they were looking for in a potential sponsor, attraction to sponsors who work the program and are of service, convenient and temporary sponsors, being required to have a sponsor for special functions, and being asked to sponsor. These subthemes expand the understanding of what starting a sponsoring relationship means in Al-Anon and each one is further described herein.

Qualities of potential sponsor. Each of the participants spoke of what they were looking for in a sponsor or what drew them to the person they intended to ask. One participant stated, “And basically when she kind of walked in the room, the room just kind of lit up. I knew immediately I wanted what she had. Now the hard part for me was the fear of asking her to be my sponsor.” The comment was made by one participant describing how she knew she wanted a woman in her meeting to sponsor her. It conveys the hope and fear many feel when starting a sponsoring relationship. There is hope that the person will be willing to help but fear that the person may say no.

Another participant explained how she learned how to pick a sponsor:

R: I would suggest that somebody not get a sponsor right away.

INT: They not get one?

R: Yeah, that they wait like four to six weeks, yeah. Don’t go to your first meeting, and pick somebody that—somebody—My sponsor told me—she’s goes, “When you pick a sponsor, pick somebody you want to be like when you grow up.” And that’s who I wanted to be, like her (C).

An Al-Anon member encouraged her to listen in meetings until she found someone she wanted to emulate. Similarly the following participant chose his sponsor because the man “had what he wanted” as he explains: “But again, he had what I wanted. He had a wife in AA and you could just tell that they loved each other and they had a good time together and all of that. And I

wanted that.” This man wanted to be in a loving relationship with a woman as committed to her sobriety as he was to his own recovery. He saw this man had it and he hoped to attain it too by working with him through the program.

Others chose to enter into a relationship with someone because they had similar backgrounds and stories:

Last year I heard her share about how she was a bossy, controlling person to her husband and kids and shared a story and I thought, “Oh my gosh, that was how I am and I want to change that.” And so, I saw that she had some same experiences as me and she’s older and wiser, and so I asked her to be my sponsor and we’re currently on step one.

I just was so attracted by her story which was related to mine and the way she described how she handled things and so I got her phone number (D).

Each Al-Anon member has (or has had) a relationship with an alcoholic. Some members want to work with a sponsor who has been affected by the same type of relationship. If a spouse’s drinking is what caused them to enter the program, they may choose to work with someone who also has a spouse with a drinking problem. The same can be true with parents, siblings, and children. One woman changed sponsors because her first sponsor did not have children and her children were causing her problems. Another changed sponsors because she was dealing with an alcoholic husband and her current sponsor’s husband did not have a drinking problem:

The person that got her in the program was a stepson. And so it became evident to me and I was also kind of pressured to change sponsors at the time. And yet I also realized well yeah, maybe I do need a sponsor that has a husband or whatever (R).

Another man changed because he wanted to work with someone who had experience with a wife with drinking problems. He explained, “And this guy was married and had kids and he had a lot of problems with his wife—not his kids, but with his wife.”

A few participants chose a sponsor because they wanted someone different than what they were accustomed. One woman explained that she wanted a certain relationship to make up

for what she as lacking in her life: “The reason I chose her is because I was looking for a relationship that was more of a sisterly relationship, to have some kind of healthy sister concept in my life because my relationships with my sisters were not healthy.” One man struggled with sharing his feelings and emotions. He found a sponsor that was able to be “expressive and real emotional and I think I wanted that.” Another participant recounted how she was drawn to her sponsor-to-be because she showed her that she did not have to be perfect all of the time:

Very early, there had been a woman who had said in a share that she had eight years in program and she felt like she was back to step one because she had eight years of recovery with her husband but her son was drinking, and it’s the first time I felt like I was in a place where you didn’t have to do things perfectly and she was a big reason I stayed. So, I asked her to be my sponsor, which was a huge step for me (F).

One man chose mean people to sponsor him because he thought the meaner they were the stronger their program:

And I thought that if I went to a self-righteous group and if I had a self-righteous sponsor, then that meant I was working the program correctly. And unfortunately my first three and a half years in Al-Anon I bounced around from sponsor to sponsor trying to find a sponsor that was so mean that I didn’t have to work my own program, essentially.

He finally figured out that by choosing people that were mean to him, he was avoiding doing the work to get better. A man who later became his sponsor spoke to him at a meeting:

And he said—“and I also need to let you know something. That no one can shame you into better thinking, including the sponsor. That’s not a sponsor’s job.” And a light bulb went on. I started hanging around this guy. I didn’t ask him to sponsor me right away because I didn’t know that only secure people—I didn’t know that only secure people can admit they’re weak. I didn’t know that. So what ended up happening was I started going to the meeting that he went to. We started talking like in between meetings and stuff. Then I asked him—would you sponsor me? And he answered it the way I think that you always answer it. You say—it would be my pleasure (G).

A common expression in the rooms of Al-Anon when looking for a potential sponsor is to “look for someone who has what you want.” Because of this, the qualities that make a

potential sponsor attractive vary from person to person. As many participants mentioned, most members choose a sponsor because they liked what they shared in meetings, they identified with the feelings or actions they shared about, or they liked their energy. The other most talked about traits were someone who was loving, someone who was actively working the steps, and someone who would listen to them. Mainly, something in the potential sponsor is attractive to them.

Attraction to sponsors who work the program and are of service. Most participants spoke of choosing a sponsor who had been in the program a long time. These members shared frequently in meetings and the potential sponsees heard something they related to in their sharings. Several of the people interviewed shared that they chose their sponsor because they liked the program they had:

I've known her since she came into the program. [Laughter] And I had a tremendous amount of respect for her, and she's the first one where I've looked at her and said, "I like the program she has. I want to have what she has (F)."

And so I chose somebody because I liked her energy, I thought she – she had 12 years at the time and she was someone who seemed to know the program really well and I was just desperate to work the steps. I just wanted to get started (O).

I don't know, it's just I like the way she does her program. I like her program and I liked the way she treated people she sponsored because I knew other sponsees of hers. Like I said, I liked her program (D).

I liked the fact that he was sort of soft spoken, had a really good program, was very active in the program, and I was really attracted to what he had and how he used his program (B).

Three participants sought sponsors who were active in service in the Al-Anon program. They likely wanted to be more active in service and wanted sponsors who could be good role models for them:

I met her when I—I met her when I was on the service board back in – so, the Southern California World Service back in 1990. That's when I met her. And she's like me. She

loves being involved in service. Or I'm like her. She's probably got like 43-44 years in, I think (E).

What drew me to the first one was that he was real active in the program and he was doing all—he was being at service, he was sponsoring other people. He kind of had a life that I wanted to have sort of. I wanted to be able to live with his problems with as much grace and dignity as he was (K).

I have another sponsor now and she's very, very loving and she's a hefty woman and she gives really nice cushy hugs and she's very, very supportive. I chose her because she is so loving and she was being of service beyond the group level (H).

Choosing a sponsor is a personal decision. These participants chose their sponsor because they liked the program a person was working or liked that they were involved in service in Al-Anon.

Convenient and temporary sponsors. A handful of participants found a sponsor or a sponsee found them out of convenience. They either had a prior relationship with the person or they knew an acquaintance of the person.

I saw somebody I knew standing right next to me at the meeting and I said well, I've been going for a short period of time but I hear there's good sponsor material here. She says well just jump in, and so I asked that person right then and there (N).

[A friend of mine from the meeting] had her start coming to Monday night and I got introduced to her and she sort of told her to ask me to sponsor her. I think that's how it happened. I didn't know all that right away, but later on I kind of—you need a sponsor. Here's a good one (S).

Somebody asked me after I was just a few months into the program, to sponsor him. He was an old sort of acquaintance from the past and I ran into him. That didn't work out at all (O).

I had a guy in our Thursday night meeting and we had a meeting on sponsorship, and there was probably about 16 to 17 guys and one of the guys came up to me and he said, "All right, well we've been talking about sponsorship and I really like what you have and you're working the steps and would you be my sponsor (B)?"

There was a friend that I had met at the meeting and she was saying that she had a sponsor, so I said, “Well ask your sponsor if she’ll sponsor me.” I didn’t even know her at all (I).

From these descriptions it is clear that asking someone to sponsor is a big step for many Al-Anon members. To make it a little easier, some are encouraged to find a temporary sponsor to try out the relationship and to see if it is a good fit:

I couldn’t even ask her to be my sponsor, like that was too much of a commitment. So, I just asked her whether she’d be willing to help me with the Steps (A).

Some temporary sponsors are truly temporary while others turn into lifelong sponsors:

I asked the woman who’s my sponsor today if she would be my temporary sponsor and she said she would and so she was my temporary sponsor for about 17 years. And she finally said, “What are we doing?” And I said, “Well, you’re my temporary sponsor.” And she said, “I know relationships that haven’t lasted this long.” Like man-woman relationships. She said, “You’re going to have to basically shit or get off the pot.” And so I said, “Well, will you be my sponsor? And she said, “Yeah (D).”

Some participants chose their sponsor out of convenience. They needed or wanted a sponsor and picked someone readily available. Some chose people who were strangers and some acquaintances. The one participant who chose an acquaintance found the relationship did not work and later he chose a new sponsor. Many of the relationships that started out as strangers worked. From the data, it does not seem to matter if the relationship starts as two strangers or two acquaintances, convenient or temporary. What matters is the connection that is made within the relationship and how the two members work together.

Required sponsors. Sometimes a sponsor is required. A woman spoke of wanting to attend a luncheon for sponsors and their sponsees. She had bought a ticket but still did not have a sponsor. A friend suggested she find a sponsor quickly. She turned to a third woman that was standing with her and asked her to be her sponsor.

In some hospital programs the families of alcoholics are encouraged to attend Al-Anon meetings. Sometimes they are asked to prove they are attending meetings and working on their own recovery. In order to do so, they are asked to find and work with a sponsor:

And I mean, every night, every time you came, you had to check and make sure you have a sponsor or not. So that's why I got her in there. I had to have it (M).

While sponsorship is not a requirement of Al-Anon, in some instances, people may feel obligated or pressured to get a sponsor. Many who stay with the program feel that having a sponsor who helped them work the program is what fostered the most growth and improvement in their wellbeing. Because of this, many members of the program tend to encourage newcomers to get a sponsor, which may be an additional source of pressure.

Becoming a sponsor. Being asked to be a sponsor for someone is an honor. Several participants recounted being taken aback when asked. They were not sure if they were ready to sponsor someone. Several mentioned telling the person that they had to check with their sponsor first to see if the sponsor thought they were ready.

And she says, "Well, the most important thing you can do is to stay at least one step ahead of the person that's asking you to sponsor them. You don't want to be behind her." So that was something that I absolutely put into place, that I was always going to be at least one step ahead of the person I was sponsoring (D).

All sponsors told their sponsees that yes they were ready as long as they stayed at least one step ahead of their sponsees in working the Twelve Steps of the program. If a sponsee moved through the steps quicker than the sponsor, the sponsor would not have experience to share about the step. Because of this, they are encouraged to stay at least one step ahead of their sponsees.

The majority of the participants spoke of sponsoring as emulating what their own sponsors did for them. For some this means helping their sponsee acclimate to the program:

I went to my sponsor and she said, “Oh, you do exactly what you’ve learned.” So, and that’s what I’ve learned is when they asked me to be a sponsor, I would start them on the system (Q).

I try to take it on, just introduce them to the fellowship and things like that, to get them going on their own (J).

Some of them had so much pain. And I really liked the fact being able – I could talk to them about that kind of stuff (M).

Each of the subthemes illustrated above: qualities they were looking for in a potential sponsor, attraction to sponsors who work the program and are of service, convenient and temporary sponsors, being required to have a sponsor for special functions, and being asked to sponsor, expose a small picture of what sponsorship is like. Participants found someone they wanted to be like or who had a program they admired. Having a good program means working and understanding the steps, sharing in meetings, welcoming newcomers, being of service to the group, and working with sponsees. One sign of someone with a good program that participants noted was that they could tell the person was involved in the program and the people in the room. They were well respected and could share about themselves and how they worked the program openly and honestly.

Others members were pushed into the relationship by convenience or requirements to attend a function or support their loved ones. The members who spoke of feeling pressured to find a sponsor ultimately were grateful they had found one. Each story is unique in how they began with their sponsors and sponsees yet there are common themes as uncovered here. This will continue to be true as the relationships unfold. Some of the sponsoring relationships work well and others do not.

Experiencing the relationship when it is going well. The majority of the participants spoke highly of the sponsoring relationship. One participant said it was the best thing that could happen to anybody. The participants spoke of their sponsor as being someone they could trust, someone they could call and talk things through, someone who will guide them through the steps, someone who will walk with them through good and bad times, someone who will lead by example, someone who will encourage them to grow, someone who will become a friend, and someone who will allow the relationship to change and be sponsored back.

Trust. Many of the participants spoke of trusting their sponsor. They may not all have used the word trust but it is implied when they talk of the feelings and confidence they have in their sponsors:

I guess that very first sponsor that I met, without even really knowing her, I was really able to bond with her. She was like warm and cuddly and kind of a little overweight, so she just seemed like a soft place to land, and when I cried and stuff I could hold her and smell her and it just seemed like such comfort of a stranger being willing to hold me while I cried and shared my inner secrets and it just is kind of like a miracle, like gosh, how could I just divulge so much of my personal life (I).

I really did trust her a lot, and she became a very good, important part of my life (A).

He was always there (J).

She spent over eight hours listening to me and was just as gentle, as kind, as wonderful a person as I have ever met in my life (F).

When it comes to program and what she has to say about the tool and the guidance she gives, absolutely, totally trust her when I talk to her (F).

So to be able to trust and expose myself and be loved just that way. And not to have to carry things alone, which I tend to want to do, withdraw (N).

I've always felt like anything I tell my sponsor is private and I've also, I've shared some things with my sponsor and his wife and I feel very good that they -- that trust is there. I try and make sure that my guys [sponsees] really know that they can be open and it's going to stay with me and end there (B).

Many were amazed that someone who was recently a stranger was now spending time listening to what they were going through at home, at work, in working their program, and in life in general. Their sponsor listened, did not judge, but maybe offered advice, and shared their own experiences with their sponsees.

Two participants shared long stories about how trust was manifested in their relationship with their sponsees. In one situation the sponsee who had grown up in a very dysfunctional home called his sponsor distraught about the suicide of his sister: “I have not been home in 22 years. I need help. What would you suggest I do?” The sponsor told him to get off the phone and to buy a ticket immediately to go back home for the funeral. When the sponsee asked why, the sponsor replied:

And I said—because the willingness is fleeting. That’s my experience. The willingness is fleeting. My experience has been that the resentment will come back up if I don’t take action immediately. So I better just do it now (G).

While the sponsor had not had experience with a sibling committing suicide, he did have experience with resentment. He did not want his sponsee to have a resentment against his family for missing his sister’s funeral. He said:

It’s my job as a sponsor—I don’t want you to do something that you regret, which is not go to your sister’s funeral, as a way to hold onto the resentment. And he went to the funeral and now his family’s talking again. They’re not close but they’re talking, they’re just talking, which is a miracle. He wanted nothing to do with them when he got to Al-Anon (G).

The sponsee was scared and did not want to be with his family but he also wanted to be there for his sister. He trusted his sponsor to support him and was able to take his suggestion and go to the funeral.

The second participant was sponsoring a "double winner," someone who was working more than one program. In this case the sponsee had been attending Alcoholics Anonymous as well as Al-Anon. One day out of the blue, she called her Al-Anon sponsor and told her she was in the parking lot where she works and had started smoking crack. The sponsor thanked her for calling her and then asked her if she knew of any rehab facilities she could check herself into. The woman ended up checking herself into rehab and this sponsor was there for her every step of the way.

She did it. I was amazed. She just went ahead and did it. To me what that said to me was that she and I really developed a trusting relationship, enough so that she just went ahead and did what I told her to do (O).

The stories these two sponsors shared were powerful and give a glimpse of the deep level of trust that can develop between sponsors and their sponsees.

A person to call or talk with. It is said in Al-Anon that the phone can be the heaviest thing in the world to pick up. It is difficult for many who have lived with alcoholism to admit they have a problem and ask for help. Many have lived in isolation with the problem for years. Coming into Al-Anon is a start but picking up the phone and asking someone to listen or be there with them when times are tough is a difficult and humbling thing to do. Many sponsors ask their new sponsees to call them every day so they get in the habit of calling and lifting that heavy phone. Many of the participants spoke of calling their sponsor regularly.

He said, "Why don't you just call me every day for the next couple weeks because if you call me every day you'll get in the habit of it and it won't feel stupid if a crisis appears. So call me every day for a couple weeks or whatever, no pressure (G)."

Most sponsors encourage their sponsees to call. They know it is difficult to pick up the phone, and become humble enough to share what is going on. They are there for the sponsee if and when they show up, even if they do not do it regularly.

And not everybody calls me. Some people don't do the steps. If someone wants to show up, let's go. Let's do it. If you don't, I love you that way and just call me whenever (N).

One woman triumphantly exclaimed that she now has people she can call anytime whom she knows will be there to help her in a heartbeat. In these calls with sponsors, it was incredibly healing for the sponsees to have someone they could talk with openly, someone who listened to what they had to say. Listening to the calls and conversations is an important aspect of being a sponsor.

I just listen. My job's to listen, that's all it is, is to let them talk (G).

I just listen to their stories (J).

Well I had to be really careful about not sharing my stuff and just listen to them and then take my stuff to my sponsor (I).

The main thing with me as a sponsor is I listen (Q).

A few mentioned that listening to a sponsee was often like holding up a mirror. It shed light on things that they needed to hear as well.

So when I'm talking to a person I know that whatever is coming up is something God wants me to look at and learn from. So, I'm talking to her about setting her priorities and realizing that I'm the one who hasn't been doing a good job setting my priorities, and perhaps what God wants me to learn, or listen to, is what do you need to do to set your priorities, and listen to what she says and listen to how reasonable that is or is there something else I need to be doing or if I find myself not using what tool am I suggesting to her because it's probably a tool I need to use (F).

Sponsors learn about themselves by listening to what the sponsees tell them but also by listening to the suggestions and advice they themselves are giving to their sponsees. Sometimes what the sponsors are saying to their sponsees is exactly what the sponsor needs to hear.

Working the steps. One of the main reasons a person chooses a sponsor is to work the step of recovery with them. While there are many ways to work the steps, the most common seems to be using a book called *Paths to Recovery*. This book includes a chapter on each of the steps, traditions, and concepts of Al-Anon. Each chapter explains what the step means, has sharings about the step from Al-Anon members, and ends with questions for discussions. Some sponsors reported that they would have their sponsee read the chapter, write out the answers to the questions, and then get together and read the answers and discuss them. Others stated that they do the whole process together, reading and answering the questions together.

Working the steps was life changing for many of the participants. One woman found comfort in the fact that her sponsor walked her through the steps. Because of her guidance and love she no longer felt “unwanted, unloved, and alone.”

For some it is a certain step or group of steps that were particularly meaningful for them:

This is about acknowledging that I’m powerless (Step 1), knowing that there’s a power greater than myself (Step 2) that can help me (Step 3). And then saying – here, you solve this because I can’t, I don’t know what to do. And when I did that over and over and over again, I found relief. I found peace, serenity, things started to come to me that I hadn’t thought of before (O).

Some sponsors develop traditions or rituals around the steps.

So I’ve incorporated that into my sponsoring other people, which is when it’s time to do the third step, after we’ve talked and written, we’ve discussed it thoroughly and they feel that they have it, we go to a very peaceful place, a place that they love. One woman went to the beach, we went to the beach together. Another woman just wanted to sit in her backyard. And another woman, we went to Griffith Park together, to the carousel. And then we say the third step prayer out of the Big Book [of Alcoholics Anonymous]. That’s

what this lady did. So it's just really a nice kind of touch to kind of connect people even more (O).

I mainly listen, but I usually will buy a special candle and light it during the process and give them the candle after. And when we do the fear inventory, if they're willing, we do a ritual where we burn it [their fourth step inventory] or throw it in the trash to release that, leaving space for something different to come through as we go along the steps. It's really special, my favorite (N).

Going through the steps with a sponsee can be equally powerful for the sponsor. The sponsor participates in the process and sees the changes that occur in the sponsee. One participant spoke of thanking his sponsor for helping him through the steps. The sponsor's reply was "No, no, thank you for helping me participate in my program and thank you." At first he was taken aback thinking the sponsor was just being humble. After working the steps with his own sponsees, he came to a new realization:

So often, I'll see something in my sponsees and I'll realize, "Wow, I'm doing that" or I hear the solution through them, something that might be happening in my life. So for me, sponsorship is a relationship where I get to grow with somebody else and I get to help guide them through (B).

There is not one right way to work the steps. Working the steps is a personal adventure embarked upon with one's sponsor. Many of the participants spoke of using the Al-Anon book, *Paths to Recovery*, to work the steps. Others mentioned using the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*. A few mentioned using a version of questions written by a long time member of Al-Anon. Sometimes the sponsor chooses the method and other times the sponsee. Regardless of the method, there is creativity in what is done. Several participants spoke of rituals they created around certain steps and prayers they recited. Working the steps often brings the sponsor and sponsee closer together as it allows both of them to make progress in their program and in their personal lives.

Through the good and the bad. Life is messy and both sponsors and sponsees reported going through tough times. Through everything though, they have someone they could count on. The participants recounted times when they relied on this relationship to help them weather some difficult events. They shared stories of walking through grief, addiction, aging, sickness, incarceration, and death. All was made more bearable because they had someone by their side.

She was there through the death of my husband, and probably at that time, he's been gone three years, and I called and she makes herself available. She says, "You call me anytime you need to." He died at two in the morning. I picked up the phone and she answered (S).

I'll tell you, when I called her and told her that I found a receipt and my husband's screwing around and whatever and I found a receipt—I said—will you still sponsor me. I mean, I've got newcomer problems. And she was like—of course I will. And she helped walk me through that (R).

One sponsor, who was obsessing about the wellbeing of her young pregnant daughter, found a sponsee in crisis to be a healthy distraction for her own obsessive behavior:

I think sometimes people are put in your lives, maybe something else is going on in your life and you don't think about it then, but then you realize later that they were there for a reason. When my daughter was pregnant, she was 21 or 22, and she called me and told me she was going to move to Santa Cruz. I freaked because I had visions of doing a 1 o'clock in the morning rescue three months down the road. Renting a trailer and getting everything. But at the same time, a lady called me who was just frantic about her husband or her boyfriend. Sometimes I think that took up time so I didn't concentrate on what my daughter was doing (C).

Another was willing to share a story with his sponsee of when he hit rock bottom, went into a rage, and was "looking for gang members to beat up" when his sponsee nonchalantly told him he had pulled a gun on a contractor over a dispute. Sharing his own crazy story let the sponsee know that he was not alone; that someone had experienced a similar crisis and is now doing much better. It gave him hope.

Another woman shared of her experience with a sponsor who had gotten older and started losing the ability to take care of herself. The sponsee got to walk with her sponsor through the aging process:

I'd have to go to her house too, a lot, and see how she aged. In the sixteen years, her health issues and the hospital trips that I went to visit her at and sometimes, it's funny, once she got a little older and she wasn't able to drive anymore, her daughter would bring her to my house. We'd meet at an Al-Anon meeting and I'd take her to my house. We'd have lunch and then I would tuck her in bed for a little nap and we would talk . . . she taught me a lot about the life stages, her being married, being healthy, losing her husband, inability to drive, falls (I).

She was able to give the love and respect back to the sponsor who had cared so much for her for the last 16 years.

Through it all, good and bad, sponsors and sponsees are buoyed by the special relationship they have with one another:

And what an amazing thing, because [my husband] was an alcoholic, I got to have this special person to walk through that with. That's just phenomenal that out of the hell of being a wife of an alcoholic I have such a good life today. It's a great gift. It's such a gift (S).

Participants repeatedly shared how grateful they were for their sponsors and sponsees. Through good and bad times, they know they have someone on their side, willing to listen or lend a helping hand.

Leading by example. When sponsoring relationships are healthy and going well, the sponsors are showing the sponsees how to have healthy relationships, how to give back to their families and to the Al-Anon program, and how to live a life of recovery.

Two sponsees said their sponsors led by example. Two other participants spoke of how their sponsors were leaders and a guide for them:

And she never tells me what to do. She always just kind of brings in the Principles, shares her experience, strength and hope. And I get to decide what I want to do (A).

She taught me to stand on my own. She taught me to think for myself (Q).

Another shared of her experience of sponsorship and the role of sponsoring:

It's to teach us how to become like women who can make decisions in life, whatever decisions they are, and not be full of fear, and not be full of envy, and not be full of guilt, and shame, and all those things that I know I came into the program with (A).

Sponsees spoke of learning how to behave and act differently with loved ones.

Participants spoke of learning to be vulnerable and open with her sponsor helped her be more open to intimacy in other relationships.

And not like sexual intimacy, but like real intimacy, like you know who I am, like to my core. And the tool of sponsorship helps me do that, but it doesn't stop there, like it's like if I can develop that intimacy with a sponsor, because I trust this woman, and then it could go out to my husband, and then it could go out to my mom, and my sister, and then it could go out to people at work, and then it could—and then it's just like—so, I guess it's like it's—it's one of the tools of the program, but I think it's just a really, really important tool that can bring a lot of miracles into your life was (A).

Another spoke of learning to be less rigid and more open to the feelings and beliefs of others.

One participant spoke of her gratitude toward her sponsor because her sponsor showed her and her husband what recovery for couples could be. This sponsor and her husband were good role models for others and started a couple's group at their house. A couple's group is a group of couples that are in Al-Anon and A.A. They meet regularly together at each other's houses and help each other learn to practice the program's principles in their home lives. Because couple's groups comprise of both A.A. and Al-Anon members, they are technically not a part of Al-Anon. However, it could be said that the groups originated from Chapter 9: The Family Afterward, of The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. This chapter is dedicated to the idea that the whole family has been affected by the disease of alcoholism and all need recovery.

The man who previously spoke of feeling the need to have a sponsor who berated him and treated him poorly, learned from another man that this was not necessarily true and that a sponsor could be loving and kind:

He asked me to go on a men's retreat with him, which was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. He introduced me to a side of Al-Anon that I hadn't seen, a really gentle side to Al-Anon that I hadn't seen—or that I had discounted (G).

These men worked the steps together and had a rewarding relationship. The sponsor led him through the steps in a loving manner, which was much different than what his previous sponsors had done. Similarly another participant spoke of working with a sponsee who was aggressive and intimidating toward his wife. He did not see his side in it and thought she was making it up. The sponsor challenged him on it and explained that he had been feeling intimidated by him as well:

I said, "Well, I want you to understand this, right now, and the last few times we've talked, you got so aggressive—you were so aggressive, I actually felt a little uncomfortable and if you noticed, I sort of backed off and moved my chair to the casters just a little further above you, because I actually felt intimidated." He goes, "You felt intimidated?" and I go, "Yeah, I did." All of the sudden, he started thinking about his behavior and that, and we started cracking up laughing about it, and again, what a great mirror for him to look back at and realize, and what a great mirror for me to be able to look at, and how that's a mutual character defect we both share, different levels, different times (B).

A sponsor showed one man how to see things from different points of view. Believing he was always right, this man could not fathom that other ideas even existed:

One of the problems I had at the beginning is that if I saw something this way, it was real hard to believe that anybody else could possibly see it any other way than the way I saw it, and it was real important for me—a big part of my growth was my sponsor talking about how different ways to look at the same problem, and that maybe if you look at it from this perspective, it's a different issue than the perspective I had. That was real foreign for me (P).

Each of these sponsors was able to help their sponsees because they had gone through similar experiences. As one participant explained, “this is the language of the heart.” They listen to what their sponsees are going through and offer their own stories as examples. It is a way of saying, “I hear you are going through x, y, and z; here is what worked (or did not work) for me when I was in a similar situation.” They share their experience, the strength that they gained, and hope that things will get better. As one member put it “By sponsoring people, you treat people with dignity.”

Growth of sponsees. A special part of being a sponsor is witnessing the changes and growth in a sponsee. Many participants spoke of feeling excited to see the improvements their sponsees made while working with them. One woman explained the transformation in her sponsee:

When I first met her when she was like a year in the program, she was shut down, and it was so hard to have a relationship with her, because it’s hard for her to be vulnerable, and it’s hard for her to be intimate like with me. And I totally related, like I know what that feels like, and now all of a sudden, like we talk all the time about all the things she’s feeling, and how—and I’ll ask her like, “How do you feel?” And she’s like, “I feel free (A).”

Participants spoke of remembering what it was like to be new, lost, and alone. They spoke of wanting to reach out to newcomers to help them begin to get better. After working with them for a while, miracles start to happen. People come out of their shell and participate more in the program and in life.

The sponsor’s role is to guide and get out of the way to let the sponsee make his or her own decisions and choices. They work the steps together and the sponsee changes and gets healthier. One participant eloquently observed:

I think it's wonderful. I don't take any credit for it, they're doing it themselves. All we can do is plant the seed and give them suggestions and then it's up to them to do whatever they need to do (K).

Watching the program work in a sponsee makes the relationship rewarding for the sponsor. It allows people to change and grow. It reaffirms the power of the program and the work the sponsor is doing with the sponsee.

Reciprocity. As the sponsoring relationship continues, the line between sponsor and sponsee can blur. As noted above, their relationship can move toward friendship. Friends share more equally, and soon sponsees are giving suggestions to the sponsors as well. The relationship becomes reciprocal.

Several participants spoke of benefitting from the sponsoring relationship by working the steps together. Working with someone newer in the program often reminds someone who has been in Al-Anon a long time what it was like to be a newcomer. They are reminded of their own thoughts, feelings, and actions early in the program and it is a good reminder of how far they have progressed. It keeps them grateful for all they have learned in the program:

But again it's the power of the program that we get to sit here and we get to share experience, strength, and hope, and it goes both ways. So I get as much out of being with my sponsees as they may get out of me (B).

As the work continues, the sharing becomes more equal:

It would be hard to tell who's the sponsor and who's the sponsee, because we're really just having an exchange of ideas and perspectives on each other's lives and how that looks from across the table instead of how it looks if you're in it. So lots of the conversations I have with people I'm sponsoring right now are just really more, either one of us could be the sponsor and either one of us could be the sponsee (P).

Working with a sponsee can allow a sponsor to see in him what he may not be able to see in himself:

I can have the same problem my sponsee does, but for me, I can't see it. But for them, it's very clear because I don't have a dog to fight. And so often, they'll come to me with a problem and we'll talk about the solution and then I'll realize, "Wow, wait a minute, I'm doing the same thing" or "I've had that same issue." So it's a very mutually rewarding process (B).

In some cases like death, sickness, or aging, the sponsee steps in to be of assistance and to give back what was given to her or him. A participant shared that her sponsees were there for her and supported her when she decided to leave an unhealthy Al-Anon group and make a sponsor change:

They helped me so much. When I told them that I had changed sponsors they said—oh, we've been—each one of them said—oh, I'm glad you made that decision for yourself. I've been hoping that you would do that. And I didn't even realize it. I was kind of oblivious to it. And they helped me and they invited me for coffee and went with me to meetings and supported me during that time. And it was a really rough time for me, making an adjustment, a change ®.

One woman spoke lovingly of her sponsor who grew older and had increasing difficulty in attending meetings and other program related events.

Her daughter would drop her off and Tuesdays was our lunch date and she'd come up in her walker and she'd share about how she's feeling powerless over her health conditions and losing her mind. She would say, "I feel like I'm losing my mind. My memory's going." She was - - then I became kind of like her sponsor in that regard (I).

It is a special moment when a sponsee realizes that the relationship has become more mutual. For several of the participants it felt good that they were able to give back to their sponsor for the help they had received from them.

Experiencing the relationship when it is not going well. The sponsor and sponsee relationship evolves just like any other relationship. It can grow and the two can become closer or it can weaken and the two need to part. Eighteen of the 19 participants spoke highly of sponsorship but many of them had had challenging experiences illustrating what it is like when

the sponsor relationship is not going well. From the data four themes developed in this area: sponsees not doing the work, a controlling sponsor or sponsee, psychiatric issues, and crossing boundaries.

Sponsees not doing the work. The first participant who spoke about being challenged by the sponsoring relationship worked as a therapist. For her it was difficult to separate the role of her job as a therapist with the role of sponsorship. Because of this, she spent time and energy keeping track of the work her sponsees did.

I had nine sponsees and I was constantly calling them about saying, “Hey, when are we gonna get together to finish your third step” and the other one, “When are we gonna get together for the fourth step,” and I was keeping inventory of where they were all at and calling them and then I also had once a month, a meeting at my house for all of the sponsees to get together so we could all be kind of supportive to each other (I).

Working the Steps is usually a self-paced process. Because she was a therapist she felt an obligation to keep them on track and moving forward like she would with her patients. She continued to work with her sponsor and one sponsee but decided to let the rest go for her own sanity. Doing so showed her sponsees that she was practicing self-care. Several were hurt but ultimately understood that she was doing what was best for her.

Working the steps can be challenging. It requires people to do a lot of self-reflection.

Certain steps tend to scare people away:

A friend of mine in AA said—you know what, I lose them at four and I lose them at nine. So I said—okay, yeah, I’ve lost three, I’ve lost a couple at four already. And one woman I lost at nine, it was perfect. It was exactly that. That was exactly what happened. So I have yet to take anybody all through the 12 steps (O).

Another added saying:

The first three steps, they can pretty much go through it and everything else, but then when you start getting into the action steps, the fourth, fifth, sixth, and you start getting into those action steps, that’s when a lot of people have problems (B).

Being challenged by the work in the steps causes many people to drift away from their sponsor or to leave the program all together. Members encourage each other to stay but it may be too difficult for some. It is not the sponsor's job to get a sponsee to complete the steps. Everyone has equal access to the steps. It is up to each individual to ask a sponsor to help guide them through the steps. If they choose not to do them, that is their choice. Nothing will happen to them other than they will not benefit from the step work. As a few participants mentioned, members are encouraged to work the program and if they choose to leave "we will gladly refund your misery." Sponsors can sometimes spend too much energy trying to get their sponsees to stay and work the program:

I've had to learn in my program that they've got to want it for themselves and if they aren't willing to put in the work, it's like the silver rule. Don't do for others what they can do for themselves (B).

Al-Anon members do not want to see people leave when they know that much healing can be done within the program. That is why sometimes they risk their own sanity and recovery by trying to work the steps for their sponsees. They are trying to be helpful.

Controlling sponsor or sponsee. Sponsors are invested in their sponsees and want the best for them. They want them to work the program and reap the rewards of recovery. As was mentioned above, sometimes the sponsor wants the recovery for the sponsee more than the sponsee wants it. One participant spoke of herself in this position:

There are a lot of difficult moments, especially if I think my way is the right way. Hello. That's my issue in any relationship. I get to notice that and back off. It's really, as we say, a program of suggestions not advice. Sometimes I can get hung up on something and I have to back off a little bit and allow the person their own process. And I'm even making amends to someone I sponsor. A man who's part of the program. Sometimes I'll say you know, I think I push that a little bit, I'm sorry. Or is there something here we need to talk

about? Were you annoyed when I said that? I want to really engage openly, so that there can be safety (N).

In her case, she saw what she was doing, reflected on it, and then made amends to her sponsee. She worked with him to make sure that he was comfortable and allowed the work to continue at his pace. Other sponsees were not as fortunate to have such a sponsor.

A second sponsor spoke of a controlling sponsee who tried to require his sponsor to jump through hoops to work with him. He demanded to be answered when he called and explicitly said what he was and was not willing to do for his program. This sponsor was able to tell his sponsee that if what he was getting from his sponsor was not meeting his expectations, then he should look elsewhere.

A few of the participants spoke about having a controlling sponsor that made their experience with them unbearable:

And during that time, I was manipulated a lot and told to do things that I didn't think were right. And so I ended up—stopped going to that group finally (R).

The same participant shared a conversation she had with another Al-Anon member. She asked the woman how she was doing and the woman responded:

I don't know, I don't know if I can call and talk to my sponsor. I'm afraid to talk to her, I'm afraid she's going to yell at me—or whatever (R).

Throughout the interviews several participants spoke to me about an unhealthy sponsorship practice, pyramid sponsorship. Pyramid sponsorship is not part of Al-Anon but some groups have taken it upon themselves to create the pyramid structure for sponsoring.

I didn't really know the significance of it until this particular lady became my sponsor, but the way that that set of meetings that I was going to at that time was set up was there was this kind of hierarchy of sponsorship—right?—so, my sponsor had a sponsor, who had a sponsor, who had a sponsor. And then it was like this is your sponsor, your grand sponsor, your great grand sponsor, they would have what they call “baby meetings,”

where you would go to your sponsor's house, and so there was a lot of emphasis on sponsorship. And that, I think, came to a point that—at one—when I first became part of that, when I first asked that lady who was part of that kind of like—sometimes they call it “pyramid sponsorship (A).”

In pyramid sponsorship there is one person at the top of the pyramid who controls how the rest of the group behaves.

She was kind of at the top of the pyramid, so what I learned in talking with her is that everything—there was no anonymity, and so everything was told to her, even though people who she didn't sponsor under disguise of, “Well, I'm their grand sponsor. I'm their great grand sponsor; I should be knowing what's going on, so I can direct, and help, and duh, duh, duh, duh, duh (A).”

The pyramid sponsorship group claims to be an Al-Anon group but they have corrupted Al-Anon's traditions. The members of these groups do not treat each other with common courtesy and respect but rather fear, belittling, and intimidation.

In fact, there were times where I would ask my sponsor for guidance—if someone that I was sponsoring was going through something. I would ask—or I would say—you know, what do you think I should do with this? Or what do you think she should do—or whatever. And she'd say to me—if you can't handle it, don't sponsor them. But then when I handled sponsoring them myself and tried to apply the principles of the program, she would say I was into self-will. So it was like I was damned if I did and damned if I don't. And frankly, towards the end there, I got where I wasn't sharing anything with her. I was just like—oh, everything's good, everything's good. And so many things that happened over the years where I had been told to do certain things that really was against how I felt, I mean, I've really agonized over a lot of things (R).

Unfortunately, the members of these groups are spreading their ways to other groups in other states. As they move away, they bring their ideas with them indoctrinating new members into their pyramid sponsoring.

Well, you know, one thing that they have people do is they push people to sponsor people and you can't sponsor people that just come to those meetings. You have to go to other meetings to find people and then bring them in. That's what people do. I mean, you'll see [members from this group] in all kinds of meetings and they're there to get newcomers and then bring them to their meetings (R).

Fortunately, some members of groups with pyramid sponsorship were starting to see the dysfunction of their group:

Dominance, criticism, judgment, all of that I came to learn once this lady who was at the top of the pyramid became my sponsor, I came to learn how detrimental that type of a setup can be (A).

I was manipulated a lot and told to do things that I didn't think were right. And so I ended up—stopped going to that group finally (R).

The World Service Office (WSO) of Al-Anon is aware of these types of groups, but because they are not a governing agency, they do not regulate what happens within each individual group. They have delisted these groups in certain counties but the meetings continue.

Psychiatric issues. Occasionally an Al-Anon member will work with someone who has psychiatric issues unrelated to their being in Al-Anon. Since members are not trained professionals, at times they may encounter situations for which they are unprepared or unqualified to handle. Two participants each spoke of two such incidents.

The first spoke of one of his sponsors who had recently found out that his wife wanted to divorce him. He called his sponsor and they made plans to meet the following day. Instead of meeting, the man drove himself to the mountains and killed himself. Shortly after the loss of his sponsor, this man had a sponsee who went off his psychiatric medicines. He was scared for his sponsee and, with the memory of the suicide of his sponsor, he reached out to the sponsee and got him help:

I picked him up and took him there and they eventually did admit him into the psychiatric thing. I don't know, maybe a week later he was still in there and me and his AA sponsor were just begging him to go back on his meds. But he didn't want to. Like I said, that was just one of those experiences—wow. And this was hard core (J).

The second participant spoke of one sponsee who started using moly and crystal methamphetamines. He told the man he could not help him anymore:

I'm bringing a knife to a gunfight at that point. As a member of Al-Anon, I am not qualified to help you (G).

He felt inadequate and unqualified to help him because sponsors are not trained. The same participant added that he also had a sponsee who was pathologically cheating on his girlfriend. He was conflicted on how to help him and sought his sponsor's advice. He shared his sponsor's advice:

If you cannot help this guy and his behavior, he's compulsive and he can't wait to tell you how he did it again, that's sociopathic, we can't help that. We're not qualified, we're not professionals, we're not paid. Tell the guy to check out a sex program (G).

The participants are not professionals and are not trained in psychiatric issues. They gave guidance where possible and then let them go.

Crossing boundaries. There are boundaries in any relationship. Sponsorship is no different. In the sponsoring relationship people often get close to each other quickly. Most of the sponsors interviewed clearly stated that they do not give advice. Instead they try to share their own experiences and what worked or did not work for them in similar situations. They try to encourage their sponsee to develop his or her own solution to the problem they are facing. If the sponsors give a suggestion, it is up to the sponsees whether to follow it or not:

So I see this fine line that gets crossed because we're not professionals. We're not counselors. We're not psychiatrists. We're not psychologists. And so I see this fine line in the sponsorship of it being helpful and also being harmful (L).

One woman reported that her friend had decided to follow her sponsor's advice and divorce her husband. When the husband found out, he killed himself. The distraught woman blamed her sponsor.

Eventually, she blamed her sponsor for telling her to divorce him because she didn't really want to divorce him, is what she said later and so this is the worst possible consequence for telling somebody to do something. It was none of the sponsor's business to say that. The sponsor could have led her to come to her own conclusion (H).

Two participants spoke of money issues involving their sponsors. One lent money to her sponsor and it was never returned. She filed in small claims against the woman. The woman moved away and the relationship ended. The other had her sponsor do professional work for her. There were issues with the work that was being done and the relationship changed. They stopped working as sponsor and sponsee.

Three participants acknowledged that changes in their sponsor ended the relationship. One woman stated that when her sponsor got older, she got mean. She thought her sponsor did not treat her well and spoke poorly of her husband. It got to the point where she could not stand it anymore and chose a new sponsor. For the next participant she realized that her sponsor no longer listened or paid attention to her. She started always talking about herself. After being invited to a party where her sponsor was in attendance, she noticed her sponsor was ignoring her:

And when I got there she just refused to acknowledge me. She didn't say hi to me. She didn't. It was the weirdest thing (O).

Another thought her sponsor was her higher power and allowed her to have too much control over her life. She expected the woman to guide her, comfort, and assure her all of the time. She realized it was an unhealthy relationship. She did not know how to change the relationship to make it healthier so she left it.

Some sponsorship relationships do not work out. When this happens it is best for both to move on to find a better match.

Ending the relationship. All things come to an end. The sponsorship relationship can end for many reasons. For some, it just ended:

I asked a man to sponsor me whom I just respect a great deal, nothing personal happened with regards to leaving my former sponsor. I just ended up getting a sponsor change (G).

This sponsee wanted a change and made it happen. Others, as previously mentioned, struggled with working the steps and left the program. Other reasons the relationship ended for the participants are sponsees or sponsors who drifted away or from the program or moved, health issues and death, practicing self-care, and having different perspectives.

Drifted away. Three participants mentioned that a sponsor or sponsee had moved away and seven participants spoke of sponsors or sponsees who just drifted away from the program:

And then she just kind of faded away (C).

She just kind of stopped doing stuff. Their house was always open to a bunch of events and functions and they stopped it (J).

We kind of drifted away, I stopped really pursuing her as a source of sponsoring (O).

He just drifted away (B).

He kind of disappeared (K).

They just disappeared (H).

People walk away from Al-Anon for a variety of reasons. They decide they are healthy and have learned all they can from the program. The person who caused them concern becomes sober and they feel they no longer need to go to meetings. They get too busy. Some will tell their sponsors they are done with the program and others will not. Feeling that their sponsee or sponsor faded away from the program was a common theme among the participants. Many never do find out why their sponsor or sponsee disappeared.

Health issues and death. The second reason that several participants ended their relationship with a sponsor or sponsee was for health reasons or a death. For some a sponsor or sponsee died. For others their sponsor grew older and the relationship changed. Because they were no longer getting what they needed from a sponsoring point of view, they changed sponsors. A few spoke of their own health issues that caused them to let go of some of their sponsees. One woman spoke of having many sponsees before having a stroke. After her stroke, she had to let them go:

I had to at least that I mean, I just, my life could not—I had to think about my own—I had to think my own stories (M).

Her stroke made it difficult to speak so she had to let some of her sponsees go, so she could focus on getting better.

Practicing self-care. Participants mentioned changing sponsor as an act of self-care. The relationship was not a good fit for them so they made a change. A sponsee can make the change.

I decided it wasn't a good place—it wasn't a good relationship for me. It wasn't jiving for me, and I decided to get another sponsor change (A).

The sponsor can make the change.

She basically told me that she couldn't sponsor me anymore (R).

A big part of the program is learning to take care of yourself. Changing sponsors or letting go of a sponsee may be in a person's best interest. Even though it may be difficult and may hurt feelings, it is ultimately the right thing to do.

Two participants shared stories of getting advice to change sponsors from Al-Anon friends. One could not figure out how to bring up a difficult topic with her sponsor:

I didn't know how to talk to her about it. I talked to somebody that said—oh, yeah, just get rid of her. Which was the wrong advice, of course. So I did. I called her up and I

said—I'm really sorry. I was crying on the phone. I'm sorry, but I can't, I just am not getting quite enough time with you (O).

Both women moved on to new sponsors.

Different perspectives or backgrounds. Al-Anon members are encouraged to listen for the similarities in each person's story to find the common ground. Each is affected by someone's drinking. Each is living with those effects. For many, it is enough to know that their sponsor has been affected by alcoholism, it does not seem to matter who the alcoholic is. Some, however, feel it is important to have a sponsor that has a similar background. For example, a member struggling with his child's addiction may prefer to work with a sponsor who has also had a child suffering in the disease of alcoholism. A few participants decided to make a sponsor change when they realized it would be helpful to have someone in the same situation as them. One woman spoke of changing to a sponsor who had several children active in the disease from a woman who had no children. Another changed sponsors because they had different reactions toward their incarcerated sons: the sponsor cut ties with her son and the sponsee wanted to continue the relationship with her son. One sponsee did not like that his sponsor was cheating on his wife so he ended that relationship.

When sponsorship works, it is beneficial to both the sponsor and sponsee. When it does not work, it is important to acknowledge that it is not working. If the relationship is not working for either the sponsor or the sponsee, it is expected that a change will be made. Both the sponsor and sponsee deserve to be in a trusting and supportive sponsoring relationship.

Summary Analysis

Each participant shared stories about their relationship with their sponsors and sponsees. Their stories showed the respect and admiration that they have for the relationship. The

participants spoke of gratitude to their sponsors for helping them and guiding them through the program and with life's difficulties. They also were appreciative of their sponsees. Through working with them they were able to continue their own work and see how far they had come. Sponsorship is a unique and special relationship that looks different between each partnership. When the sponsor and sponsee fit well together, the relationship is powerful and benefits both members. When it is not going well, it may be better for both members for the relationship to end. In that way, both are free to move on to a relationship that would work better for them.

Chapter five will discuss the findings as they relate to other helping relationships and the relevant literature.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge about the relationship between sponsor and sponsee in Al-Anon. Al-Anon is one of many self-help groups based on the founding principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. The focus of Al-Anon is to provide help to those who are affected by someone else's drinking. Sponsorship is one component of Al-Anon. It is a peer relationship where one member helps another work the Al-Anon program. This study seeks to understand more fully the nature and quality of sponsorship as perceived by sponsors and sponsees. Further guiding questions were: What are the perceived benefits and challenges of sponsorship? In what ways does sponsorship contribute to or inhibit the recovery of Al-Anon members? Al-Anon members share stories with each other in meetings and in relating to their sponsors and sponsees thus the choice of narrative inquiry for this study was in concert with the participants' familiarity and comfort with telling their stories. Their stories of sponsorship uncovered the uniqueness of the sponsorship relationship. In this chapter, my interpretive understanding of the findings as presented in the fourth chapter and the relevant empirical and theoretical literature will ground the discussion of the sponsorship relationship as perceived by the participants of this study.

I will first provide an overview of the key findings of the study with my reflections on the experience of being engaged in this work as a researcher and a member of Al-Anon. I will follow with a discussion that compares sponsorship to both formal and informal relationships including therapy, friendship, Alcoholics Anonymous sponsorship, and mentorship. Next the meaning and nature of boundaries in relationships as related to these participants' stories will be examined. Finally, the relational qualities of sponsorship will be considered.

Overview and Reflection on Key Findings

Listening to the participants share their experiences was a positive and rewarding experience for me. In Al-Anon we listen to each other tell stories but we very rarely stop and ask questions about them. Sometimes we may find the person who shared after the person has ended and make comments or ask questions then. However, most of the time as soon as one person stops talking, the next person starts. It is a little like serial monologues. During the interviewing, I struggled a little with stopping someone and asking questions as it goes against the norms in Al-Anon. I would remind myself that it was an interview, I was the researcher and we were not in an Al-Anon meeting. I did find myself at this crossroads often and had to repeatedly remind myself of my role.

Another challenge I found was because I am also in Al-Anon we had common knowledge of the Al-Anon program, I would all of a sudden think, “maybe I should have them explain what that means for the reader.” It is possible that while I was looking for clarity, I may have caused them to lose their train of thought. I had to learn when to interrupt and when to be still and let their stories unfold. At times, while listening to these stories, I wanted to respond to the participant and give them advice or maybe show them a different way to look at whatever it was they were dealing with. The boundaries I learned in Al-Anon made me a better researcher. I could disengage from my need to problem solve but still be an empathetic listener.

As I read and reread the stories of sponsorship and the themes that emerged, I grew more excited about what was developing. Much of what the participants shared with me, reflected what I have heard in meetings and read in the Al-Anon literature. I also became very familiar with everything that I was working on within my research. The stories started to blend together. I

was beginning to wonder if I was misrepresenting or leaving something important out of the big picture of sponsorship in Al-Anon. I wanted to make sure I was representing sponsorship accurately. This led me to reaching out to two Al-Anon members. I asked them to read chapter four and offer their reactions to the findings. Their comments and reflections confirmed the findings as relevant and meaningful to their experience with sponsorship in Al-Anon. They indicated that there were no discrepancies in the excerpts or my thematic appraisal of them. My reflections and the ideas generated from our discussions will be referenced throughout the analysis.

A question developed as a result of my reflections on the data. What is the cornerstone of sponsorship? Is it willingness or trust? What comes first? Both sponsors and sponsees need to be willing to develop a relationship and work together. Both also need to be willing to discuss difficult aspects of their lives. Trust is often needed to be willing to invest deeply in a relationship and opening up to strangers can be frightening. Learning to trust and being willing to share personal vulnerabilities, aspirations, and failures are both needed to be in a fruitful sponsorship relationship. Yet trust and willingness to share is fundamental to many formal helping relationships such as psychotherapeutic, medical, and mentoring, as well as the more informal, friendship. What might be unique in the emergence and maintenance of these qualities in sponsorship? Where does sponsorship lie on a continuum of formal and informal helping relationships?

Sponsorship, Therapy, and Friendship

There may come a time when a sponsor may suggest that a sponsee seek professional help. A sponsor is not professionally trained. Some members were referred to Al-Anon by

therapists and continued working with them after they began attending meetings. Many Al-Anon members have benefitted from therapy and sponsorship. One of the women who read chapter four and I discussed at length the need for therapy while in Al-Anon. Each of us has utilized sponsorship and therapy. They both have their time and place and can work well in tandem. We agreed that while therapy is beneficial there is a special bond and comfort level found in sponsoring that is not felt in the therapeutic relationship. In therapy, therapists have strong boundaries they uphold. They tend not to reveal too much of themselves. The relationship is one sided with the patients or clients revealing their issues, and concerns. The therapist can be seen more of an expert who listens and strategically leads the client to change through theoretical and practical understanding of human behavior. Two of the participants that I interviewed are therapists. One spoke of being client focused and not hierarchical. She also stated:

As a therapist, I selectively disclose. That's not the idea. It's not about me and I'm not sharing my experience. I want to connect with my clients and I may selectively share something in general, but in sponsorship, I share deeply and equally. It's a way of connecting and comforting the people that I work with. That I have the privilege of sponsoring. It's such a great privilege.

A more equitable relationship is built between sponsor and sponsee. When a sponsee does not like what her sponsor says she is more comfortable and able to say "I am not ready for this" or "I don't like that." The bond between sponsor and sponsee embraces reciprocity of relational power.

Al-Anon adopts a practical view and starts with what do I need to do right now to get better or feel better today? In Al-Anon members learn to fake it until they make it (an expression understood and used by Al-Anon members). They learn "no" is a complete sentence and can be

used to take care of themselves. In Al-Anon we are open and willing to work on ourselves. In the fourth step we start to uncover the “why” of our actions and move to a deeper level.

Sponsorship may also be compared to the trust that emerges in intimate friendships. Gambetta (2000) wrote, “one trusts one’s friends more deeply than strangers” (p. 231). I would counter that we often trust sponsors who started out as a stranger, more than we trust close friends. Friendships are an important aspect of many people’s lives (Bell, 1981; Lewis, Al-Shawaf, Russell, & Buss, 2015). Bell (1981) wrote, “Friendship is a voluntary, close and enduring social relationship” (p. 402). Lewis et al. (2015) looked at friendship from an evolutionary perspective and found that it has “benefitted ancestral humans in both the currency of natural selection—reproductive success—and the currency of subjective wellbeing, Happiness” (p. 37). Friends share more feelings, have more reciprocity and positive affect with each other than siblings (Floyd, 1995). Many of the participants spoke of friendships that developed with their sponsors or sponsees. Other people did not want that type of relationship with their sponsor. They wanted the boundary between friendship and sponsorship to be respected. In my own work in Al-Anon I wanted to have a sponsoring relationship that could develop into a friendship. From the meetings I attended, the Al-Anon literature I read, and speaking with friends about the relationship they had with their sponsor, I knew sometimes the relationship turned into a friendship. I knew I needed a sponsor I could get really close to so I would feel comfortable enough to trust her and vulnerably share what was really going on with me. From my experience with Al-Anon friends, I knew I needed a mutuality of and vulnerability. The nature of reciprocity in the relationship allowed me to be able to be there for my sponsor as well. Unlike a psychotherapeutic relationship that is guided by ethical guidelines (American

Psychological Association, 2010), there are no rules in Al-Anon that prevent the transition of a relationship from sponsoring to friendship. The sponsee chooses the type of sponsor they want and it is up to the sponsor and sponsee to work on the relationship to fit both of their styles and comfort levels.

Sponsorship, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Mentorship

In this next section I will discuss relationships similar to Al-Anon sponsorship. The most obvious is sponsorship in Alcoholics Anonymous. Mentorship and other helping relationships will also be discussed to develop a deeper understanding of Al-Anon sponsorship.

Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon. This section examines sponsorship in A.A. as compared to sponsorship in Al-Anon. There is considerable research on sponsorship in A.A. and several on the helping nature of A.A. members in general. I now turn my attention to this literature to further understanding of the findings of this study on sponsorship in Al-Anon.

Al-Anon was modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) thus it could easily be assumed that these relationships are very similar in nature. Clearly there are similarities between both groups, but these findings revealed distinct differences. For example, sponsorship is more structured than sponsorship in Al-Anon. The relationship is hierarchical and more authoritarian than in Al-Anon. While the literature does not say sponsorship in AA is authoritarian, it leads to that understanding. For example, Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, Inc. (2001) writes, “We will go to any lengths for victory of alcohol” (p.76). According to B (1996), a sponsor can “provide some temporary discipline” (p. 11) and show tough love. Sponsors in A.A. often have conditions or rules a sponsee must adhere to. B (1996) requires his new sponsees to commit to working the steps, attend ninety AA meetings in ninety days, and to call every day for ninety

Alcoholism is considered a disease (Keller, 1976), that is not curable but can be controlled. Sobriety, in the beginning, is considered a matter of discipline so those new to sobriety and Alcoholics Anonymous are thought to require more structure. For a newly sober alcoholic, following a sponsor's guidance to the letter is viewed as the key to living a sober life. An A.A. sponsor has clear, short-term goals that often are just trying to get their sponsee to midnight without drinking.

Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, Inc. (2001) states, "If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any lengths—then you are ready to take certain steps" (p. 58). A.A. members take this to mean that sponsees should do what they are asked or told to do. If it has worked for their sponsor, then hopefully it will work for them. It is often said from the podiums in A.A. that, "I needed someone louder than my own head." Meaning they need someone whom would they would listen to and not disregard. A newly sober sponsee may be required to attend daily meetings, to take commitments at each of these meetings, and to call her sponsor every day. Their struggle is with alcoholism, a chemical addiction with powerful control over their thinking and actions. In AA the connection with meetings and a sponsor are considered essential in maintaining sobriety.

Helping is a big part of A.A. The traditionally recognized symbol of A.A. is a circle with a triangle in it. The three points of the triangle represent the three legacies of A.A.: service, unity, and recovery. Al-Anon uses the same symbol but the triangle in Al-Anon is outside of the circle. The legacies are the same. Service is the word used for helping. The very nature of helping keeps A.A. functioning (Zemore & Pagano, 2008). Like Al-Anon, A.A. utilizes its members to set up and run the meetings. If members did not do this, the meetings would not take place. Service has

allowed the program to survive as an organization (Zemore & Pagano, 2008). The preliminary study done by Whelan et al. (2009) asked sponsors how they viewed their role in helping sponsees. The concluded from the study three central purposes: help in working through the program steps, giving support, and carrying the message of A.A. (p. 420). All three of these are found in Al-Anon and are evident from the participants in this study.

A.A.'s primary aim is to help people maintain their sobriety. Sponsorship is one component of the program. Riessman (1965) posed the "helper therapy principle" that those who help others in similar situations help themselves. The findings of this study revealed that sponsors used the principle of "what worked for me" to model for the sponsee behaviors and attitudes that might work and help release them from obsessive thinking and worrying of others. By sharing what she has with her sponsee, the sponsor is also working on her own sobriety. By helping others, she is helping herself get better (Zemore & Pagano, 2008). In their research Zemore and Pagano (2008), found that there was no difference in how people helped based on demographics. All equally can help and be helped. Helping is a strong force in recovery (Zemore, Kaskutas, & Ammon, 2004). The only requirement to help other A.A. members is having found sobriety through the help of others in A.A.

Because A.A. is the brother organization of Al-Anon, Al-Anon is similarly structured. However, instead of helping each other in sobriety, sponsors and sponsees in Al-Anon help each other in building healthier relationships. They learn to keep the focus on themselves instead of other people. This literature supports the claims from the participants that sponsoring is beneficial to both the one receiving as well as giving (Whelan, Marshall, Ball, & Humphreys, 2009; Zemore et al., 2004; Zemore & Pagano, 2008).

Mentorship. In chapter two, I discussed Kram's (1983) phases of mentoring and the similarities I anticipated between them and the phases of sponsorship. The findings suggest that there are similarities and as well distinctive differences between these helping relationships. Kram describes the phases as a more linear path characterized by four foci: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition.

In the mentoring relationship, the mentor and mentee get to know each other (initiation phase), the relationship grows in depth, trust, and output (cultivation phase), and then begins to pull apart (separation phase), and finally the relationship changes or ends (redemption phase).

Four dominant topical themes emerged from the data analysis in chapter four: starting the relationship, experiencing the relationship when it is going well, experiencing the relationship when it is not going well, ending the relationship. Each of these themes had subthemes that illuminated the structure, quality, and purpose of the relationship between sponsor and sponsee. Each of these will be explored through the framework of Kram's (1983) phases of mentoring as shown in Table 5.1.

The first phase of finding a sponsor is positioned before the initiation phase described by Kram's (1983) model. Kram's model begins after the mentoring relationship begins. In Al-Anon, finding a sponsor is also important and deserves a phase of its own.

Starting the relationship. Sponsees reported having a particular impetus to initiate their seeking of a sponsor. Each of the 19 participants spoke of how and why they chose their sponsor (or sponsors) and how the relationship with them began. In mentoring, Kram (1983) called this period initiation. In her work, the initiation period lasted from six to 12 months. In this study of sponsorship, I found that what sponsees were looking for in a sponsor and how they began their

relationship is important and worthy of discussion. This phase, finding a sponsor, would be a precursor to Kram's phases.

Table 5.1

Comparing Kram's Phases of Mentoring to the Sponsorship Relationship

Kram's Phases of Mentorship (Kram, 1983)		Phases of Sponsorship in Al-Anon	
		Starting a relationship with a sponsor	Al-Anon member observes other members to find someone he wants to work with
Initiation	Mentor and protégé are getting to know each other	Using a temporary sponsor	A temporary sponsor may be used to start the Steps or to see if the two are compatible
Cultivation	Boundaries are clarified, relationship is beneficial or not	Experiencing the relationship when it is going well	The relationship is healthy and can be mutually beneficial can turn into friendship
		Experiencing the relationship when it is not going well	Either the sponsor or the sponsee is not happy with how the relationship is working
Separation	The protégé is expected to leave the nest and become more independent	Ending the relationship	The two drift apart, illness or death cause the relationship to end, or either decides to end it for whatever reason or none.
Redefinition	The relationship changes to a friendship		

In the finding a sponsor phase, the sponsees have decided they want to find a sponsor. Most observe what they see in meetings and they listen for someone who has a similar story and background to them or they look for someone who will fill a void missing in their previous relationships. They may want to be involved in service and so they pick someone who is actively involved in service work. They may choose someone out of convenience or may use a temporary sponsor. Most participants spoke of choosing a sponsor because they believed their potential

sponsor was working a good program: they were involved in the meetings they went to, had a sponsor, worked the steps, and people looked up to them. Each individual has a unique reason for choosing a sponsor and each has a different story on how a sponsor was asked. Most get to know their potential sponsor through the interactions they have with them in meetings and in service opportunities.

Initiation. This phase is described as the getting to know you period that mentors and protégés go through. Kram (1983) wrote, “the events of first year serve to transform initial fantasies into concrete positive expectations” (p. 615). The idealized relationship in their heads begin to form or change in reality in direct response to the interactions they have. The findings of this study did not exactly correlate to this phase. The participants with whom I spoke did not break down their relationship to what it was like from the very beginning to what it developed to over time. Instead, they spoke of what the relationship was like when it was going well, and what it was like when it is was not going well which will be discussed below. Nonetheless, both mentorship and sponsorship proceeds into the cultivation phase or the relationship may not go well and it will end. If this should occur the sponsee begins the search for a new sponsor again.

Al-Anon members may choose to begin sponsorship with a temporary sponsor. A temporary sponsor may be used to get started in working the steps. It is also used to test to see if the relationship is a good fit. It may be easier to ask someone to temporarily help than to help permanently. The relationship can turn in to a regular sponsorship and continue to the cultivation stage or the sponsee may start looking for a new sponsor. The sponsor or sponsee may decide the relationship is not working or the sponsee may have found someone they want to work with in a

more permanent relationship. In which case, the starting a relation with a sponsor phase would begin once again.

Cultivation. In this phase of mentoring, Kram (1983) explained that:

The boundaries of the relationship have been clarified, and the uncertainty of what it might become during the initiation phase is no longer present. For some there is disappointment in discovering that the relationship cannot meet important developmental needs . . . For others, the relationship is far richer than anticipated, and the interpersonal bond is far more intimate and personally meaningful. (p. 617)

The findings of this study are similar to Kram's conceptualization of the establishment of boundaries and the success of an ongoing relationship or the disappointment of a relationship, which does not meet the needs of the mentee. The participants of this study described in detail the successful relationship, that is, when it was going well, and when it was not. Those who found that their relationship was not meeting their needs often let their sponsor go and seek a new sponsor.

Experiencing the relationship when it is going well. The majority of participants centered on those times when the sponsoring relationship was going well. There is a very touching story of a sponsee who, after many years of being supported and cared for by her sponsor, was given the opportunity to care for her as the sponsor grew older and less independent. This relationship is an example of the type mutuality of empathy and care that can be found in Al-Anon members. In Al-Anon it is said that, "we never have to do anything alone anymore." I can attest to this as I have had several Al-Anon friends help me when I needed it. I have had friends go with me to doctor appointments, to visit sick family members with me in the hospital, and to put down my very sick cat. When my sponsor's husband died suddenly when they were vacationing in Aruba, her closest Al-Anon friend dropped everything, and flew down there to be with her. There is

always someone to call on to be there in person or on the phone no matter what that person is going through. This collective support is not an expectation of more formal relationships that I have compared sponsorship with but it is the norm for Twelve Step programs.

The findings validated benefits of sponsoring relationships. It is expected that sponsees work through their challenges differently for although each has access to the same program materials there is ample opportunity to interpret the guiding principles differently. Members seek a person with whom they will work well with and get to know better through sponsorship. For some it becomes a friendship and the roles can reverse or become fluid. It was common for sponsors of this study to have a strong bond with many sponsees across time and concurrently. Although not all sponsees are people a sponsor would normally choose as a friend, sponsors reported feeling appreciation for each individual and being grateful to have been given the opportunity to know them in a deep and profound way.

Experiencing the relationship when it is not going well. The participants in the study also spoke of when the relationship does not go well. The most surprising part of the interviews was the talk of pyramid sponsorship. The participants who spoke of this type of sponsorship spoke of one particular Al-Anon group. They named the leader and the history behind the group, which I have chosen to leave out of this report for purposes of confidentiality. I had heard of the group but was surprised that it continues to grow and spread throughout the country as members move and establish the pyramid model in their new location. Participants of this study spoke of practices that were not consistent with the recognized and accepted Al-Anon approach to healing. For example, members were told to recruit members from other Al-Anon meetings, and to take other people's inventory from the podium. Taking someone's inventory means to list all

the things they are doing wrong although this is a part of the fourth step individuals are expected to take their own inventory and not that of others. Finally and unfortunately, the practice of shunning and shaming others was promoted rather than a norm of offering support and praise.

One participant told me that she was grateful that she had not joined that group but was able to see some positive features of the pyramid structure in that those who share at the meetings seem to be working a strong program and share it well from the podium. This recognition confuses me because the negative aspects are so contrary to the traditions of Al-Anon and the group has hurt (and continues to hurt) many people, and yet good can be found there. This dual nature of the group makes me want to know more about it and to try to understand their motives. Do they believe the good they do outweighs the bad? In many ways the norms of this group are the antithesis of the values that Al-Anon purports and I worry for newcomers that are seeking help, joining a group that supports the unhealthy behaviors of shunning, shaming, and punishment will not get the help they need. Here is one example of shunning, shaming, and punishment that was disclosed by a participant: Her sponsor was upset with something she had said at a meeting and she was told she would have to “be small for a period of time,” make amends to her sponsor, not share at any meetings, and sit in the back of the room. Those people living with an alcoholic, often for many years, are desperate to connect with people who have experienced the same disappointments and misfortunes. They want to grab on to any little bit of love they can find. They do not have any way of judging whether a group is respectful of the culture of Al-Anon. They do not know that the practices of the pyramid group do not promote healing. Oftentimes, they are manipulated to the point that they do not see a way out. In many ways it has the qualities of a cult and its tendrils are spreading. One woman spoke

of the constant pressure to find newcomers from other meetings and bring them to her group. She continued saying, “you’ll see [members of this group] in all kinds of meetings and they’re there to get newcomers and then bring them to their meetings.” Another shared that “there was no anonymity, and so everything was told to her, even through people who she didn’t sponsor under disguise of, “Well, I’m their grand sponsor. I’m their great grand sponsor; I should be knowing what’s going on, so I can direct, and help.” She also commented that in this group she would hear, “if you leave this group, and if you leave this type of sponsorship, you will die out there” which she interpreted it to mean, “for Al-Anon it’s not physically die, but emotionally or spiritually die, and so there’s a lot of fear that goes into that.” The fact this group exists saddens and angers me. Al-Anon is an organization whose sole purpose is to help others. To have people reach their bottom, finally seek help, and wind up in that group, is frightening to me. I want them to know there is a better, healthier way to learn the tools of the program.

The other surprising revelation was from the man who sought a mean sponsor. He believed that having a sponsor that treated him poorly would help him grow the most. He thought being demeaned and shamed would help him get better. He had grown up in an alcoholic home and experienced how his mother’s sponsor treated her in A.A. Speaking of these sponsors he said they, “harshly takes your inventory and then criticizes you about your behavior or about the way you’re dressed or you’re breathing or whatever your sponsor wants to criticize you about.” Fortunately, he later learned that the criticisms he was receiving were not true or helpful to his recovery. He searched and found a much better fit with his new sponsor that treated him lovingly and gave him support. As I reviewed earlier in this chapter A.A. sponsorship is quite different than the way to healing in Al-Anon. Ultimately, this man was able to work the steps

with a supportive and caring sponsor that loved him through the process. He was then able to pay forward a supportive and caring sponsor to his sponsees.

All of us come to Al-Anon not knowing any better. We come from all different backgrounds, and our only connection is alcoholism. The bulk of the stories reported in this study reflected the genuine desire of sponsors to facilitate healing at the sponsee's pace rather than the infrequent reports of sponsor's desire to demand and expect compliance to their authority.

Separation. In this phase, mentors and protégés begin to pull apart from each other. The protégé is expected to be more independent and less reliant on the mentor. It is the moment when their protégés are pushed out of the nest and fly on their own. The separation phenomenon was not consistently reported in this sample of participants. However there were examples of sponsees becoming more self-reliant and independent, for example, when sponsees have completed working the steps for the first time, when they became sponsors themselves and started relationships with their own sponsees.

Redefinition. Kram's last phase is redefinition. In this phase, the relationship has been redefined, primarily to a friendship. While this happens in sponsorship many sponsoring relationships continue as initially structured. In fact, more than sixty percent of the participants have been with the same sponsor for over 25 years. These redefined relationships move across roles in sponsorship. While a friendship can develop most continue to also have a sponsoring relationship as well. A few of the participants mentioned putting on their sponsor hat when they stepped out of the normal bounds of friendship and back into the role of sponsor. When the discussion is over the proverbial hat is removed and the conversation or activity continues. To

illustrate, I have been in my sponsor's car on the way to a non Al-Anon related event, chit chatting as friends do when I wander into a topic that is related to Al-Anon. It may be that I am frustrated with a co-worker or family member and I am talking casually about it. She will say, "I am putting on my sponsor hat" and will then share what has worked for her or will give me another way to look at the situation. It is usually a brief episode and then it will change back into friendship mode. Most sponsoring relationships that are redefined change to friendship similar to what I have found with my sponsor, which I discussed earlier in the chapter.

Ending the relationship. In addition to the phases mentioned above, sometimes the sponsorship does not work out. When this happens the relationship ends. The act of separation in ongoing relationships that do not have a prescribed stopping point is difficult to navigate even for professionals (Marmarosh, 2017). In Al-Anon, members are taught early on that if their relationship is not working with their sponsor or sponsee, they should make a change. It is seen as taking care of oneself to move on. In this study, the main reason the sponsoring relationship ended was because either the sponsor or sponsee was unhappy in the relationship or was no longer having their needs met. Sponsors are known to say from the beginning to sponsees: "If you feel you are not getting what you need from me, you may need to get a different sponsor." This is to let them know from the beginning that it is okay and sometimes even necessary to move on to a new relationship. A sponsor may also end the relationship. Participants shared with me that they had told sponsees, "I am no longer able to help you; I think you should look for a new sponsor." Some relationship ended because it became apparent that the participants had different background or perspectives from each other. Other terminations were more

circumstantial and were not due to a negative experience with the relationship. Some of these reasons are: moving away, death, sickness, and drifting away from the program.

Summary. In each of the phases of sponsoring, a sponsor or the sponsee may terminate the relationship. When this happens the sponsee will often return to the first phase and look for a new sponsee. The complex nature of the sponsoring relationship phases is outlined in Figure 5.3.

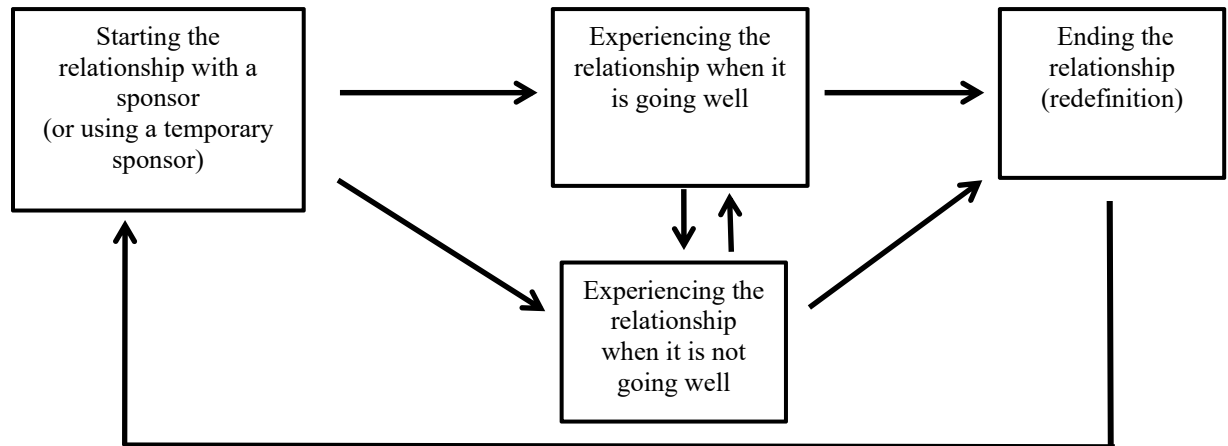


Figure 5.3. The complexity of phases of sponsoring relationships.

Notice the cyclical nature of the relationship. Al-Anon members choose a sponsor (or a temporary sponsor), the relationship moves forward and is going well or the relationship does not go well and the relationship either ends or gets better. The relationship can end, be redefined or the sponsee can start over and start a relationship with a new sponsor at any time during the cycle. The majority of the time is spent in the area of “experiencing the relationship when it is going well” because Al-Anon members learn how to take care of themselves. If things are not going well, they make a change. They talk to their sponsor and work on changing the relationship for the better or they end the relationship and start a new one with a different sponsor.

Boundaries in Relationship

Boundaries are the limits we set for what behavior is acceptable or unacceptable to us in relation to others. Boundaries can be fluid and may change across the life of a relationship. In those relationships that are not formally codified or professionally defined, such as professional helping relationships, changes in boundaries may not be explicitly recognized. The rules for what is acceptable behavior in relation to other shifts as the relationship itself deepens in intimacy or conflicts and disagreements evolve. Boundaries are more defined and formal in a therapeutic setting than in friendship. Boundary setting is one of the foundational parts of the Al-Anon program and these principles are evident in the sponsorship relationships of this study. Living with alcoholism in the family often results in a lack of differentiation between the family member and the alcoholic. Thus, many of the Al-Anon books devote pages or sections to recognizing the lack of boundary and the inability to establish role appropriate boundaries in different relationships. By the time someone has come to Al-Anon, their life has become unmanageable. Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters (2008a) explains:

Many of us have come to Al-Anon without clear boundaries of any kind. Decisions that affected us have been made without our input or understanding. We weren't given the opportunity to ask questions or offer opinions. As a result, some of us learn to be silent, helpless victims, never fully participating in our relationships. Others grow angry and resentful from these situations. We jump at any chance to tell our boss, our spouse or the cashier at the dry cleaners how we feel about everything, and just how unfairly we are being treated. We don't give ourselves the time to think before we speak, and we often wear out our relationship. (p. 95)

Before Al-Anon people living with an alcoholic have struggled in a crazy environment and obsessed so much over other people for so long, that they do not take care of themselves well. One of the first things heard in meetings is “to put the focus back on ourselves” not on the

alcoholic and to focus on our own lives. One participant commented that she enjoys being a sponsor because it allows her to work on her boundaries in a close and caring relationship.

Al-Anon actions for healthy boundaries. According to the Al-Anon principles there are three actions in establishing healthy boundaries: (a) detaching from the behavior of the people they are obsessing about, (b) focusing the attention on themselves, and (c) setting boundaries of acceptable behavior (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., 2008b). Boundary setting generally comes after the achievement of the first two of these actions.

In Al-Anon, members are taught the idea of detachment. Detaching means letting go of the obsession over what someone else is doing. It means taking the focus off the other person and putting it on themselves. These ideas are also found in the Serenity Prayer attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr and commonly used in Twelve Step programs: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference .” (Sifton, 1998). What is it that the Al-Anon members cannot change? They cannot change someone else’s behavior. What can they change? They can change their own behavior. Knowing what belongs to the Al-Anon members and what belongs to others is where serenity is found. If they can focus on changing what they can and not on what they cannot change, they live much simpler and less stressful lives. Working through the Twelve Steps of the program helps members learn to focus their attention on themselves instead of on the behavior of others. Once focused more on their own behavior and issues, they are better able to set healthy boundaries on what behavior and actions are acceptable to them.

Boundaries modeled in meetings. In meetings boundaries are set when people follow the expected Traditions of Al-Anon and of the group. One example of a boundary is that

members should not cross-talk. When someone shares, others are not allowed to comment. At the end of the meeting a member can seek people who shared out and make a comment about what was shared. In that way the sharing stays about each person as individuals. Another example is that members also learn to speak in “I” statements. They talk about themselves and not the alcoholics. A third example is to speak up when the boundaries are not being followed in a meeting. One of the participants shared that sometimes her sponsees will come to her to talk to her about a meeting where people were not following the Traditions of Al-Anon (the boundaries of the meeting). Her response was: “Well, did you raise your hand and share? No. I said, “Well you’re the one with the program. You should know better. You’re the one. It’s your responsibility. Why are you telling me this? You should have raised your hand.” She is explaining to her sponsee that it is her responsibility to say something when she thinks the group is not following the traditions of the group. Another shared that when one of her meetings started going against the traditions, they did a group inventory to see where they could make improvements. A group inventory means a group looks at how the group functions to see if there is anything they needs to improve upon, and then they try to work on it to make things better. As an example, a group that does not grow may take a group inventory and decide they need to be more welcoming to new people or even start a newcomer meeting to provide them with more information and to connect them to people in a smaller group. This participant shared that the inventory helped the group get better for a while but then it returned to its old ways. She chose to leave the meeting.

In the Al-Anon literature there are sections on setting boundaries (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., 1992, 2002, 2008a, 2008b). Often heard in meetings, from the readings, and

from others is that “the person is not doing it to us, they are just doing it.” One sponsee was taught, “If your name is not on the envelope, it is not your stuff.” Members are taught it is okay to say, “I am sorry, I can’t talk right now” if someone calls and they are busy. They can also take a break and excuse themselves from uncomfortable situations.

Boundaries in sponsoring. Boundary setting extends to sponsoring relationships. Some sponsors allow their sponsees to get very close to them. They invite the sponsees over to their houses, they have book studies with all of their sponsees together, eat meals together, attend conferences together, and engage in other activities that are not specific to sponsoring. Other sponsors keep their personal and sponsoring lives separate. Their sponsees may have allotted times for phone calls, they may never invite their sponsees to their home, and they may not tell a sponsee who the other sponsees are that they have. Sponsorship and the boundaries people set within those relationships vary greatly from person to person. A participant disclosed that one benefit of being a sponsor was learning to set boundaries. She said, “at the start of a call saying, ‘I’ve got to do something in 15 minutes’ and actually holding to the 15 minutes.” Another struggles with keeping boundaries:

I’m very outgoing. I’m very personable. I’m an includer, so I know that they are attracted to me and I try to tell myself, “Keep the boundaries, just be a sponsor” but it doesn’t happen like that. We end up going to Al-Anon activities or Al-Anon conventions and sleeping over and then it evolves to a friendship.

There is not one right way to do it. The sponsor and sponsee work together to find what is appropriate and comfortable for each of them. If one is not comfortable he is free to move on to a new sponsoring relationship. B (1996) explains there are two times when to change sponsors in A.A., when staying in the relationship is endangering your sobriety or if it is in the best interest of your sponsee. The same could be said in Al-Anon but instead of sobriety, if it endangers your

mental health, let the relationship go. One participant said he had to let one sponsee go because he started using drugs again and another because of mental illness. Three participants explained why they let a sponsee go:

This is why she went through so many sponsors, because she wouldn't do what anybody asked her to do, and suggested. And she was married to this wonderful guy, and all she did was create drama—drama, drama, drama, drama, drama. So, that's the first person I had to let go. (E)

I used to sponsor a guy who could not wait to tell me how he cheated on his girlfriend. It was downright kind of—I mean, not kind of—it was pathological. It was really gross. I've never fired a sponsee before except for him, except for him. I don't believe that I hire them so I can't fire them. But he is one of only three people I've told I can't help. (G)

One sponsor told each sponsee they were free to find a new sponsor if they did not like what he had to offer them:

That's what I always tell the guys I sponsor too, "Hey, if you're not getting what you need from me, by all means, please seek out someone else." I don't hold anybody by the chains and say, "Hey, you're going to do what I tell you and you're going to stick with me," no, no, no. That's not how it works here. We're giving freely into you so if you feel like you're not getting it from me, please go with someone else and I won't feel bad about it. (K)

In this study sponsors and sponsees moved the relationship toward mutual empathy and empowerment, both grew personally within the relationship, each contributed to the growth of the other, and both seemed authentic toward one another. Relational-cultural theory (RCT) explores the development of relationship. Many of the ideas and concepts found within RCT relate closely with ideas found in Al-Anon and the findings of this study. Jordan (2010), wrote of RCT:

RCT therapy offers a responsive relationship based on respect and dedication to facilitating movement out of isolation. In this context, people heal from chronic disconnections and begin to rework maladaptive, negative relational images, which are keeping them locked in shame and isolation. Energy is generated, feelings of worth

increase, creative activity resumes, and people demonstrate enhanced clarity about their experience and about relationships. Most importantly, they engage in relationships that contribute to the growth of others and community is supported. (p. 96)

RCT moves people out of isolation, helps people heal from broken relationships, helps develop new healthy relationships, increases self-worth, and encourages new relationships that will foster growth in others. Similarly, Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters (2013) shows RCT and Al-Anon share many of the same opportunities for growth:

The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems. We believe alcoholism is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery. Al-Anon is not allied with any sect, denomination, political entity, organization, or institution; does not engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. There are no dues for membership. Al-Anon is self-supporting through its own voluntary contributions. Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic.

Al-Anon helps people break out of isolation, heal from broken relationships, and develop healthy relationships by sharing their experience, strength, and hope with each other. Learning to be self-supporting creates self-worth. By welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic Al-Anon fosters growth in others. Sponsorship is built on these same values.

Jordan (2010) wrote, "RCT is built on the premise that, throughout the life span, human beings grow through and toward connection. It holds that we need connections to flourish, even to stay alive" (p. 1). Sponsors and sponsees help each other connect and change. In Al-Anon sponsors lead sponsees through the steps, which encourages the sponsee to grow, to be self-reflective, and to find areas in which he can improve. It also helps them form a stronger connection to one another. A participant explained the purpose of sponsorship:

We don't tell people what to do, and I look at my role as a sponsor the same that my sponsor did, the job is to get you through the 12 steps and to help you learn the tools of the program, and we're just guiding each other through the literature and through the tools in the program. (B)

His attitudes, behaviors, and values begin to change as he learns the tools and progresses through the steps. The relationship between sponsor and sponsee would be considered a growth-fostering relationship (Jordan, 2010) because then both individuals mutually benefit from the experience. Jordan (2010) and Miller (2015) characterized growth-fostering relationships as having five good things: "an increase in energy; increased knowledge and clarity about one's own experience, the other person, and the relationship; creativity and productivity; and a desire for more connection" (Jordan, 2010, p. 25). This is reminiscent of an Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters (2013) reading:

It is through the fellowship that we ease our emotional burdens by sharing our experience, strength, and hope with others. Little by little, we come to realize at our meetings that much of our discomfort comes from our attitudes. We begin to change these attitudes and learn about our responsibilities to ourselves. We discover feelings of self-worth and love, and we grow spiritually. The emphasis begins to be lifted from the alcoholic and placed where we do have some power—over our own lives.

Al-Anon members get better by sharing in meetings and in the sponsorship relationship, as characterized in this study, what has happened before they came into the program, what happened to get them to come to the program, and what it is like now that they are actively working the program. By doing this, they share their knowledge with and offer hope to others that they too can change and create a healthier way to live.

In personal or familial relationships Al-Anon members take what they have learned in meetings and from working with a sponsor to these relationships. "Setting boundaries helps me take care of myself in relationships and keeps me from being a victim. Responses to boundaries

help me evaluate the quality of my relationships” (Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters, 2008, p. 14). They learn to set boundaries and to talk about their needs and wants in relationships. They are more able to communicate what they find acceptable or unacceptable and what they can and cannot live with. If they do not like how they are treated or the behavior of others, they can end the relationship. A participant was able to see that an Al-Anon friend was struggling with her relationship with her sponsor. She shared that she told this friend, “This is supposed to be a loving interchange. And if that’s not what you’re getting then maybe you should change sponsors.” One woman and her husband had been in a pyramid sponsorship group. They have since left the group and found healthy Al-Anon and AA meetings that they attend regularly. They are using what they have learned working with their sponsors in their respective programs on their marital relationship. She explained:

Right now my husband and I, we’re actually working through things, we’re talking about things that we never talked about and we’ve been married for 23 years. And we’re talking about things now that we never talked about because both of us—my husband was actually involved with an AA group that was associated with the group that I was in. And we both were sponsored and it was like—you don’t talk to him about it. You talk to your sponsor about it. And then I mean, it wasn’t healthy. And we’re finally starting to have some interchanges. We’ve actually had some arguments. For years we didn’t argue. We’ve actually had some healthy arguments and interchanges and it’s been really good.

In their old program they had been taught to only trust their sponsors and not to talk with their spouses. This was not healthy and their relationship was damaged. Fortunately, they changed meetings and began working with new sponsors who taught them to set healthy boundaries and to discuss issues when they come up with each other. In this way, they are now communicating and building a new healthier relationship.

Conclusion on boundaries in relationship. It is interesting to note that the literature on setting boundaries primarily focuses on relationships with a power differential (Barnett, 2008)

such as in therapeutic, mentoring, and work place relationships. In Al-Anon members are taught to create their own personal boundaries as they deem appropriate in each relationship.

Boundaries are not walls to put up to block people out or keep them apart from the person but rather are flexible, changeable, and removable. Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters (1992) reminds members “Knowing my boundaries does not mean forcing others to change; it means that I know my own limits and take care of myself by respecting them (p. 345).

Therapeutic relationships are bound by a code of ethics (American Psychological Association, 2010) that “include dimensions such as touch, location, self-disclosure, time, gifts, fees, and personal space” (Barnett, 2008, p. 6). Some of these are rigid boundaries and others are more flexible. Barnett (2008) disclosed, “Having some appropriate flexibility with boundaries may improve the relationship.” Clearly some boundaries are unacceptable and inappropriate to cross in professional roles. In the teaching relationship, Tom (1997) discussed frameworks (boundaries) for working with graduate students and shared that there is a vulnerability that students have when working with professors because of the power differential. She added that there is a responsibility to protect and develop that space where students are open for questioning and uncertainty and not to exploit it (crossing the boundary). The same can be said of sponsorship. Sponsees vulnerably open up and share difficult experiences that they often do not share with anyone else. A sponsor could easily exploit this but are taught by the traditions of Al-Anon to hold everything that is said in confidence. Some of the participants who have left pyramid sponsorship groups shared that often their sponsors would shame their sponsees during the meetings and share things that were said in confidence. This breaks their anonymity and causes them to lose trust in their sponsors. One woman shared they she stopped sharing anything

with her sponsor after a while because of the lack of trust and because her sponsor would not keep what was told to her in confidence. She later found a new sponsor in a new meeting and slowly worked on rebuilding trust. Anonymity is a vital part of the culture of Al-Anon. The suggested opening that is read at most meetings states:

Everything that is said here, in the group meeting and member-to-member, must be held in confidence. Only in this way can we feel free to say what is in our minds and hearts, for this is how we help one another in Al-Anon/Alateen. (Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters, 2013, p. 11)

One final aspect of sponsorship that helps minimize exploitation is that men and women are encouraged to seek out a sponsor of the same sex; “This usually promotes better understanding and reduces the chances of romantic involvement and complications that may distract from Al-Anon’s primary spiritual purpose” (Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters, 2000, p. 4).

Members are encouraged to form their own boundaries and learn to use them properly and appropriately with other members, their sponsors and sponsees, their families, and everyone they come in contact with. In this way, they take care of themselves by learning to set limits on what behavior is acceptable.

Qualities of Non-Professional Helping Relationships

People often report a feeling of great satisfaction in giving to others in helping relationships. In this section, I turn to the qualities of these relationships and their commonality to sponsorship with specific attention to the experience of the sponsor. Non-professional helping relationships are common in Western culture and have emerged from the need for care that cannot be provided through professional services or family members. Typically, these helpers are lay people that may or may not receive orientation to the role and a brief, focused training relevant to their helping role in a specific community. As with Al-Anon helpers are often from

the ranks of those who have experienced the same or similar life problem. The literature on lay helping relationships identifies three qualities that also appeared in the reflections of participants of this study: empathy and distress, gratitude, and helping.

The balance of empathy and distress. Members in Al-Anon can easily put themselves in the shoes of others in the program. Empathy is the ability to understand what someone else is going through. Aragno, (2008) explains empathy, “is a way of reaching to the heart of the emotional sense of another’s experience, beyond and beneath surface signifiers, by resonating with its unreferenced, nondiscursive, expressive, and emotionally evocative elements” (p. 735) which directly correlates with what sponsors do. They understand that the crises will resolve and life will continue for the sponsee but they empathize with what they are going through. One member was able to hear and benefit from an issue her sponsee had:

By working with her, I started to learn a lot about my own relationship with my husband, because I can’t see it that closely when it’s my husband, but I could understand where her husband was coming from, and I could detach from her husband, and that helped me kind of understand my husband, and try to detach from my husband a little bit better. (A)

Another participant was able to share her personal experience with living through depression to help another member:

It took time and then when I was just about through that depression I got a call from a lady and she was going through a depression. Her sponsor suggested that she call me and I remember feeling so good about getting to share with someone how I got through it, just taking one step in front of the other. (R)

Many people, who are living with active alcoholism or its effects, find that Al-Anon meetings are the only place where they can find people who have gone through similar circumstances. Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings of another person. Rogers

(2007), who was the first to discuss the importance of empathy in therapeutic relationships, wrote:

To sense the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the "as if" quality—this is empathy, and this seems essential to therapy. To sense the client's anger, fear, or confusion as if it were your own, yet without your own anger, fear, or confusion getting bound up in it, is the condition we are endeavoring to describe. When the client's world is this clear to the therapist, and he moves about in it freely, then he can both communicate his understanding of what is clearly known to the client and can also voice meanings in the client's experience of which the client is scarcely aware (p. 243).

But empathy is not just seen in therapeutic relationships. It is found in most relationships and is a fundamental component of society. Decety and Cowell (2014) confirm:

Empathy has a vital role in social interaction, from bonding between mother and child, to understanding others' feelings and subjective psychological states. Empathy-related processes are thought to motivate prosocial behavior (e.g., sharing, comforting, and helping) and caring for others, to inhibit aggression, and to provide the foundation for care-based morality. (p. 337).

Once the personal distress of newcomers to Al-Anon has been reduced by working the program and working with a sponsor, their empathy for others may allow them to become sponsors. One participant shared, "when you're new everything's a crisis. As you grow in [in the program] it dwindles. The crisis dwindles to how important is this?" The distress lessens as you learn to work the steps. Another participant said of his sponsees, "When you see people that are hurting and that are in pain and that, you want to be empathetic about all of that." As a sponsor, members are empathetic to what their sponsees are going through because they have experienced similar things.

Even if members have not experienced exactly the same thing, they can imagine or picture it happening based on their own experiences: "We can see in others our own attitudes, actions, and feelings. We can feel their pain and recognize their denial of reality because we too

have suffered and hidden from the truth” (Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters, 2007).

Similarly, another participant commented, “It’s that relationship, because every single one of us knows that when someone is sharing we understand it. This is the language of the heart. We definitely can feel the pain.” Possibly because members have been there and experienced the same as the person in need, they are more likely to reach out and offer help or say “yes” when asked to help. Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters (2000) claimed, “Many of us feel ready to become sponsors when our attitude toward the problems that brought us to Al-Anon or Alateen has changed from one of anxiety and hopelessness to one of faith and assurance” (p. 7). After working with a sponsor and experiencing the empathy her sponsor has shown her and seeing how her distress has diminished, the sponsee is ready to show the same empathy for others who ask to be sponsored by her.

Gratitude. Bartlett and DeSteno (2006), in their study on gratitude and prosocial behavior “gratitude plays an important role in facilitating costly helping behavior in a manner distinct from that of a general positive state or simple awareness of prosocial norms” (p. 324). Costly helping behavior is a helping action that may cost the person who does the act of helping something. The cost could be discomfort, time, energy, money, and displays of emotions. Showing gratitude improves the relationship even if there is a cost to one or more members of the relationship. In sponsorship, gratitude is very apparent. The sponsee is grateful for the guidance, love, and support she receives from her sponsor. The sponsor is also grateful for the relationship because she learns more about herself and how to work the program from working with the sponsee. A popular saying in Al-Anon is: “to get it, you have to give it away.” This gratitude creates a cycle where a sponsee is grateful and wants to give back to the program, he

then becomes a sponsor and his sponsee becomes grateful for the support he provides, and so it continues to the next sponsee. As one member stated in Al-Anon Family Groups (1985):

When a member is new, nothing is expected except his or her own healing; but as time passes, the whirling emotions settle and it is vital to do service for the progress of Al-Anon. Doing service [sponsoring] can contribute to our personal growth and development. In this way we can express our gratitude and repay some of this huge debt we owe to Al-Anon. (p. 26)

Even in repaying the debt of gratitude, Al-Anon members gain new insight into their wellbeing and themselves. They pay it forward and help the group.

When people start the Al-Anon program they are often seeking answers. They want to know how to stop the alcoholic from drinking. They believe that if she stops, they will feel better and all will go back to normal. Members quickly learn that Al-Anon does not teach how to get the alcoholic to stop drinking. Al-Anon members learn to focus on themselves and not on the behavior of the alcoholic or others. The other Al-Anon members help us by being of service. They do everything to keep the meetings going: They unlock doors, set up chairs, make coffee, read the readings, share openly, invite us back, and clean up. When newcomers begin to feel better they begin to give back by participating in service like most of the others do. They begin to help too so the meetings continue. Many participants spoke of their sponsors helping them to get involved in the program and to give back by being of service:

She took me through the steps right away, and got me involved with the meetings and service and that. (R)

These people say you can't keep it unless you give it away and she was being of service. (I)

I kept doing my service thing. I do a panel at juvenile hall once a month and some other things. (J)

I'm still committed in going to those meetings, and being of service. (E)

[My sponsor] was very instrumental in getting a fire under our butt, to get off our butt do something about it, sign up for something, do something. Get involved. (C)

A culture of helping. In their study on when and why we help others, Oarga, Stavrova, and Fetchenhauer (2015), found that: “Those who both helped others without expecting the help to be returned and lived in a country with a strong norm to help were the happiest participants” (p. 251). While Al-Anon is not a country, there is a strong norm to help each other in the community of the meeting. Members do not expect help to be returned to them per se, they see how the community helps others. Helping allows them to feel good about themselves and to begin to belong to the community. These results supported the hypothesis that specific places may alter helping behavior.

In Al-Anon meetings the readings and feel of the room causes more people to want to help. Often even the newcomers see how everyone pitches in to help clean up the meetings and they help too. This leads to the helping literature within organizations. A study by Lamy, Fischer-Lokou, and Guéguen, (2015) showed that helpfulness may occur more frequently in certain places. The study found a positive effect of helpfulness when the participants were near flower stores or hospitals. In their study, they found the word love closely associated with flowers and help closely associated with hospital. They made the correlation that these words, love and help, associated with these places caused more people to be compassionate when they were in those locations. Perhaps the same is true

It could be the culture of helping each other in Al-Anon is the norm therefore even newcomers take part in helping to feel included. Helping is an organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB are actions that benefit an organization’s task performance (Taber &

Deosthali, 2013, p. 343). In Al-Anon the task performance is to get healthier. Members do this by being of service: sharing at meetings, helping clean and set up, leading meetings, and sponsoring. Taber and Deosthali included other forms of OCBS: sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue, and self-development. Each of these can be found in Al-Anon service work and in its Steps and Traditions. For example, sportsmanship can be seen in Al-Anon's Tradition 1: "Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity" (See Appendix I). Members work together to help each other. Each of these OCBs guide individual's reasoning for helping.

Of note is Taber and Deosthali's (2013) claim that there is not one theory that explains all of the reasons that people help each other. They described categories that motivated people to help in some situations but not others such as contributing to a team, personal values, contingent helping, reciprocity, and job responsibility. They lastly make a call that future researchers develop a working theory that would explain the motives of why anyone would help in any situation.

Motivation for helping. A closer step toward a theory why people help each other is the work of Tschakraborty and Rudolph (2015), which sought to create a model of help giving. Their research led them to the conclusion that the helper and the helpee influence the act of helping (p. 100). There are four areas that came to light in reference to help giving: Responsibility of the moral actor (helper) (feelings of guilt, shame, and regret lead the moral actor to feel responsible to help the person in need), responsibility of the person in need (helpee) (if the person in need garners empathy, they are likely to be helped. If their need garners anger, than they are not), Empathic concern (empathic concerns lead to higher levels of guilt, shame,

and regret which leads to more help giving), and perspective taking (higher degrees of perspective taking, leads to more help giving).

The stories of sponsorship in this study corroborate the idea that both the helper and the helpee have responsibility for creating a healthy helping relationship. If we look at sponsorship, the sponsor (helper) plays his part and the sponsee (helpee) does as well.

Responsibility of the sponsor. Tscharaktschiew and Rudolph (2015) suggest that guilt, shame, and regret are moral motivators for helping yet these emotions are not a part of the Al-Anon culture or reflected in these findings. Al-Anon uses more positive sayings to get people motivated to help like, “when I got busy I got better,” “pay it forward,” “Let it begin with me,” and “Progress not perfection.” Perhaps these words “beginning to do service work” (helping) is a way to step out of our guilt and regrets into a healthier life:

Al-Anon service challenges us to emerge from the isolation of our misery and build new relationships with people who are learning to integrate Al-Anon principles into their lives. First, we learn that we are not alone. Then we learn and practice relationship skills so that we don’t have to be lonely. We all process at our own pace, without anyone telling us what to do or how to do it. We want to expand our comfort zone and learn from our mistakes. (Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters, 2008)

One woman spoke of her willingness to help others in the program:

You can only get back what you’ve been given, so I just model myself after the people that came before me. It sounds like all fresh, new stuff to newbies but it’s just the same old stuff that I’ve heard and rehashed. It’s so powerful. It just works. (S)

Another shared, “I love just doing anything I can to help others, because it’s one of those things where you remember what it was like when you were new, and you just—you felt lost, and alone.” Being of service gives back to the program and helps you connect to more people in the program. One member shared how her sponsor helps her work the steps.

We just finished that, step one, and I'm having some struggles of accepting my son's marijuana, pot use, and I'm feeling powerless so she goes, "You know what? We're gonna do step one again. We're not gonna move to step two." I'm like, what? And she goes, "Yeah, you need to grasp that you are really powerless over that situation. So, that's how she worked the steps. (I)

In this case the sponsor (helper) had the responsibility to see that the sponsee still needed work and help in one area, letting go. The sponsor had her do more work on that step.

Responsibility of the sponsee. Sponsors cannot do the program for the sponsee. One participant spoke of one of his sponsee's frustration saying, "One of them gets so frustrated with me because I absolutely refuse to tell him what to do." In Al-Anon it is the responsibility of individuals to ask someone to be their sponsor. They have to want help enough to ask for it. One participant shared that even though she has been in the program for over 30 years, she still needs her sponsor. Her sponsor helps her work through the issues she has with her adult children that have substance abuse issues.

One woman found she could be a different type of helper depending on the sponsee. She could sit back and wait for them to tell her how they wanted to do the work or she could guide those who did not know how to proceed. Either way though, she relied on the sponsee to tell her what she needed.

Interesting, they were different, it was different, each one, like if I started talking to you and say—you want to do the steps? And you pretty much know what you want to do. And so I would let you tell me how do you want to do it—and if you said—I don't have any idea—well, then let me tell you. I was very easy with everybody. (M)

Sometimes a sponsee has to realize she is holding herself back before she is willing to accept help. A participant related her experience:

I was critical [of the help available in Al-Anon]. I found every reason – I criticized the words, I criticized the language. I think it was just a continual being loved where I was, because those were all just ways to keep me separate and not have to be vulnerable. (N)

She was able to see that there was help available to her if she allowed herself to be vulnerable enough to ask for it and to accept it.

Perspective taking. In peer led groups and helping relationships often the members have shared a similar experience in living. Members depend on these common experiences to provide an understanding perspective on each other's current difficulties. There are many examples of self-help groups, for example, cancer support groups, bereavement groups, and recovering from addictions groups.

Because a sponsor can remember being in the same type of situation as a sponsee and can see how much his life has changed since being in Al-Anon, he is more likely to want to help his sponsee. He is able to see that what the sponsee is going through will not last forever. This sponsee knew her sponsee would live through her current issue. She had the benefit of being detached from the situation and could show her sponsee a new perspective:

I think one of the hardest ones is the call when the sponsee is in a real panic because her child, her teenager, is behaving in ways that are absolutely abhorrent to her and I've already lived through them with my teenage son. So, I'm the one who is currently knowing that this is going to be temporary. She will survive it. (F)

Working with the sponsee can help sponsors put their own life in better perspective. One sponsor noticed the advice he was giving his sponsee was exactly what he needed to hear. Having told it to someone else, he was given a new perspective and could apply the same advice to his own life.

Like I said, as a sponsor. One of them was constantly having trouble with business and he would tell me this. I said – because you don't like your clients. Be nicer to your clients and this and this and that. Then all of a sudden I catch myself at work – a client calls or comes in and I realize I'm all angry and pissed off because they're interrupting me. And that's when I realized – wait a second, didn't I just tell so and so? And those things kept happening over and over. (J)

Similarly, another sponsor found helping a sponsee and listening to her, helped her in dealing with her own daughter better.

Trust. A final motivation for helping is trust. A sponsor may invite the sponsee somewhere or say something nice to her or remember something she once told her. A sponsor listens and shares what has worked for him when he was in a similar situation. These positive encounters build toward the establishment of trust. Trusting someone new can be a big step for a newcomer to Al-Anon. One woman after hearing a nice comment from her first healthy sponsor said, “and my heart just sang.” Another woman felt she was not good enough in her regular life. She commented:

I always thought that I wasn’t good enough or smart enough or white enough or whatever enough, and then it was like so good. It was like, “Oh my gosh, all of these white people have problems like this? I just thought it was a Hispanic thing” and helped me deal with accepting myself and that alcoholism affects everybody and rich people and poor people and white people and everybody. So, that was good for me to resolve in Al-Anon. (I)

The help that she got was not one easily described. She found acceptance, understanding, and trust in her sponsor and in Al-Anon. She learned her problems were not because of who she is or her ethnicity, it is because of the disease of alcoholism and how it affects people.

Conclusion

The stories told here are a reflection of the nature, structure, and quality of the sponsorship relationship among Al-Anon members. Each relationship is unique but many of the attributes found in this relationship were consistent with the principles of RCT. Boundaries are central to the sponsoring relationship and Al-Anon as an organization. Members are taught how to create and use boundaries within meetings and with their sponsor so they can then use them in a healthy way with their family and friends outside of the program. A discussion of sponsorship

in AA and Al-Anon showed that while similar, sponsorship in AA is more hierarchical in nature. Mentoring and sponsorship proved to have many similarities. Kram's (1983) phases of mentoring provided a framework from which to examine sponsorship in how the relationship progresses from finding a sponsor to ending the relationship. Lastly Al-Anon has created a culture of caring that motivates most members to be active in service, including sponsoring others.

Limitations

While every effort was made to obtain a wide range of participants, the study was limited to a list of participants provided to me by the local Al-Anon Area Public Information Officer (PIO). The final purposeful sample included only those that volunteered to take part in this research project. Al-Anon is an anonymous program and as such it is difficult to gain access to its members. I contacted the governing board, the World Service Organization, and they had me contact the PIO, who gave me access to the members I contacted. The study was mainly conducted with Al-Anon members living in Southern California apart from two members who were from out of state. This limited the study to a small purposeful sample of nineteen individuals. Future research studies could be replicated in other areas to confirm the findings of this study. There has been very little research on Al-Anon because of the required anonymity of members to outsiders. Being a member of Al-Anon gave me access to study the relationship of sponsorship that has heretofore not been the subject of formal research. As such, it is laying the groundwork for future studies on sponsorship in Al-Anon. Although my membership allowed this study to be possible, it also created challenges in balancing my experience and knowledge of Al-Anon, with the perspectives brought by the participants of this study. In cases where my own

experience and opinion has been offered, I have tried to label it as such and to clearly demarcate those voices of the participants. Finally, because of the paucity of literature specifically on the Al-Anon sponsorship, I have had to rely on other lay helping relationships to contextualize and compare these findings. It is hoped that the connections made to other relationships will encourage and hasten future research on this widespread but neglected area of exploration.

Implications for Practice

This research and the findings lead me back to Al-Anon and the WSO. Unfortunately, due to the nature of Al-Anon being a peer-leading program, that may prove difficult. If I brought my new knowledge to meetings and tried to teach what I knew, I am no longer a peer; I am a leader. I would no longer have the same standing in the group. Another option is to publish a pamphlet or book about sponsorship to explain the power of the relationship and to alert those to the possibility that it may go wrong as in pyramid sponsorship. I may use my knowledge to speak at an Al-Anon conference about the power of the sponsorship relationship. The two communities I would like to share my research with are the psychotherapy/ counseling community and the addiction/ recovery community. Counselors and therapists would benefit from knowing about the sponsoring relationship because it would allow them to understand the informal relationship that happens between sponsor and sponsee. It is not a relationship to fear or discourage their clients from establishing. It would be beneficial for the therapeutic community to understand more completely the nature and quality of the sponsorship relationship. For example the findings of this study show that the relationship is largely controlled by where the sponsee is. The sponsor does not dictate the relationship. There is not a hierarchy; the sponsor

and sponsee are on the same level. It is not unusual for the relationships to have a mutuality of sharing.

The addiction community would also benefit from understanding the relationship better. What little knowledge on sponsorship is available to them is on sponsorship in Alcoholics Anonymous. This study shows how they differ. In addition, in the literature on addictions and recovery when Al-Anon is talked about, it is done so only as an ultimate benefit to the person with the addiction and does not explain how it helps the families and friends of those struggling with addiction. This study begins to explain the benefits for Al-Anon members in their own growth and development.

Implications for Leadership and Change

There are many different leadership theories at work in sponsorship in Al-Anon. Three will be discussed: Transformational (where the sponsor creates a shared vision of the relationship with the sponsee), Authentic Leadership (where the sponsor is as a model of the values he encompasses such as the tolls and principles of Al-Anon) because they encapsulate what the data shows happens in sponsoring relationships in Al-Anon, and Servant (where sponsors help their sponsees live healthier, freer, and more autonomous lives).

The qualities of sponsors are described in a way that resonates with the principles of transformational leadership as shared by this participant:

I learned how to treat people. By sponsoring people, you treat people with dignity. When you see people that are hurting and that are in pain and that, you want to be empathetic about all of that. You don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. Not necessarily being a yes man either, but you want to be very gentle with the people you're sponsoring. And it has taught me to be a good person on the outside. (K)

This is similar to how transformational leadership “occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). By working with a loving, supportive, and caring sponsor, a sponsee learned how to be loving, supportive and caring to his own sponsees. According to Northouse (2010), transformational leadership is a “process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards and long-term goals” (p. 171). Working the Steps with a sponsor in Al-Anon is a process that changes and transforms people. The long-term goal is to live a life of serenity (Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, Inc., 2013).

A sponsor and authentic leaders share many of the same qualities. Authentic leadership is an offshoot of transformational leadership. Luthans and Avolio (2003), describe authentic leadership as “a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (p. 243). They further explain that:

The authentic leader is confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, transparent, moral/ethical, future-oriented, and gives priority to developing associates to be leaders. The authentic leader is true to him/herself and the exhibited behavior positively transforms or develops associates into leaders themselves. The authentic leader does not try to coerce or even rationally persuade associates, but rather the leader’s authentic values, beliefs, and behaviors serve to model the development of associates (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

These attributes are seen in sponsors as they lead their sponsees as well. Feiste (2011) enumerated five ideas of authentic leadership that fit the data on sponsorship in this study well. She wrote that authentic leaders are: (a) Guided by heart and mind, (b) Build strong relationships, (c) Leading with purpose, (d) Empowering others, (e) Dedicated to growth and learning. Similarly a sponsor guides his sponsee by his heart and mind. One participant even

called Al-Anon and the work we do, “the language of the heart.” Sponsors, like authentic leaders care for their followers and want them to join the vision and love what they are doing as much as they do.

Sponsors build strong relationships with their sponsees. Sponsors and sponsees develop a deep relationship of mutual admiration and respect while working the Steps together. As one man explained of his sponsor, “He just kind of showed me the way. He kind of got me started on the steps.” He was empowered to begin doing the work for himself. Another participant spoke of how he felt working with his sponsees, “I want them—to make them feel comfortable to be able to say what’s really down there, to encourage that.” He was encouraging his sponsee to get in touch with his emotions and feelings and to share them with him. This is an authentic connection. The same sponsee continued his comment by adding:

When I was done with the steps, I remember talking to [my sponsor] and saying, “I feel like I’ve just got so much more to learn,” and he says, “Don’t worry about it.” He said, “You’re going to work with other sponsees and you’re going to go through the steps many, many times with them, and each time you do it, you’re going to learn something that you didn’t know,” and he’s been very, very true. (B)

His sponsor confirmed to him that he would continue to learn even more about himself and the program when he began taking a sponsee through the steps. By working through the steps, the sponsee is getting to know his true self and is then better able to guide a sponsee through the steps as well. This is similar to how authentic leaders learn about their “true self and act in accord with that true self” (Caza & Jackson, 2011, p. 353). Authentic leaders or sponsors stay true to their beliefs and guide their followers or sponsees to do the same. They help them find their authentic true self and to develop it.

The sponsor leads with the purpose of helping the sponsee learn to take care of herself, setting boundaries, and finding a spiritual connection.

She gave me, in the very beginning, she gave me a diary and she said, “Listen to your dear God” and then she also told me, and I know that, and I think at the time *Courage to Change* wasn’t out yet, but buy that. That’s a daily reader. Read it daily. In the back, you can check if you’re angry or compassionate, all the subjects. Read on that. So most of the—besides writing, she was adamant and she said, of the diary, she said, “This is your Dear God diary,” and she said, “Every day or whenever you feel a struggle you write Dear God, and you just—it could be one sentence. It could be a paragraph, but just write whatever’s going on or whatever comes out.” (Q)

The sponsor empowers his sponsees by sharing his experience, strength, and hope with them so they can see from whence he came and where he is now.

And then the one other thing I realized, kind of a thing of all my sponsors, was I’m afraid of change. And one of the attributes that all of them have is they all just moved out here from other places with nothing or hardly anything ahead of them. The first one from Pittsburgh, and the other from—or the first one from Chicago, the second one from Pittsburgh, and my current one all the way from India. I think that was some trait I admired in them, just—wow, you picked up and went. (J)

This sponsee learned from his sponsors that change is okay, that he can live through it, and can even learn from it. Sharing stories of what a sponsor has gone through and how it he is now helps a sponsee see that he too can change by working the Steps of the program.

The sponsor is dedicated to growth and learning. The whole purpose of Al-Anon is to grow and learn from each other. Both the sponsor and sponsee learn from each other and the Al-Anon program how to better themselves.

[My sponsor] said, “Well, this is a process and I’ll explain to you how you do the process, but I think you’re really going to get a lot out of it.” So I did and I absolutely loved it because it revealed a lot to me of some of the things that have really molded me to the person I am, good, and bad. So I realized that I had this really, fear of failure, fear of abandonment, some other issues that I don’t think other processes would have worked as good for me (B).

I did writing on it and took it through the steps. And I got to see my part in certain circumstances. But a lot of it is letting go and moving on and realizing that I can't control those people and the only thing I can do is just be, just try to be the best Al-Anon member that I can be, and be loving and practice love and kindness and understanding. (R)

Like authentic leaders, sponsors care for their sponsees. They are guided by their hearts and minds, they build strong relationships, lead with purpose, empower their sponsees and are dedicated to the growth and learning of their sponsees as well as their own growth and learning.

Although sponsorship is only one part of the Al-Anon program, participants speak to its power in leading to a healthier way to live. One sponsee explained:

I just felt always so supported and so loved throughout all those big major crises. So, it's more than just sponsorship and sponsee. It's a whole healthy family that supported me like a big bubble through everything I went through. (I)

Sponsors sacrifice time and energy to create an environment where change happens in them and in their sponsees. This investment in others is similar to servant leadership. Sponsors help sponsees become healthier, wiser, freer and more autonomous by working the Steps with them. Later many sponsees will become sponsors themselves to lead others through the Steps. These ideas are similar to Greenleaf's (1997), writings on servant leadership. While sponsoring another, the sponsor focuses on the other by sharing her own experience, strength, and hope with her sponsee. She shares what has worked for her to help the sponsee get an idea of healthy choices to make. At the same time, the sponsor and sponsee are part of the larger organization of Al-Anon that provides a common ground for the relationship built on the steps and traditions of Al-Anon. In a larger sense, the two are both working to connect closer to their own concept of a higher power (or God of their own understanding). Focusing on others and being a part of

something larger than your self confirms the core sources of meaning on servant leadership from Keith (2012).

Sponsors lead their sponsees through the steps, help guide them to create healthier boundaries for themselves, and encourage them to help others in the program do the same.

Conclusion

The stories that have been told shed light on the supportive and important relationship that is sponsorship in Al-Anon but these have only just tapped the surface of what might be learned of this helping relationship. This study of sponsorship uncovered the nature of boundary formation, the shared and differentiated qualities with mentorship, friendship, and therapeutic relationships; and the relational characteristics of empathy, gratitude, and trust. These were attributes shared in primarily positive relationships and yet to be discovered is a deeper understanding of sponsorships that “don't go well.” The principles of RCT provided a theoretical base for conceptualizing the aspects of sponsorship that created mutuality, shared learning, and connectivity between sponsor and sponsee. Most importantly, for the first time, the role that sponsorship plays in healing for those that live with family members suffering from addiction has been uncovered.

Appendices

Appendix A

Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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Appendix B

Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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Appendix C

The Letter Lois W. and Anne B. Sent to Groups and Individuals

Which Later Became the First Al-Anon Family Groups, Dated May 1951

Dear Friends:

Since experience has proved that the A.A. program is a way of life which can be helpful to the non alcoholic, there are now 87 A.A. Family Groups (including some Loners) known to the [Alcoholic] Foundation, and perhaps... many more..... The purpose of these groups is threefold:

1. To give cooperation and understanding to the AA at home
2. To live by the 12 Steps ourselves in order to grow spiritually along with our AA.
3. To welcome and give comfort to the families of new AAs.

The time has come when it seems wise to unify these groups. A post office in New York City, to be used as a clearinghouse, has been secured, and Lois W. has volunteered to act as temporary chairman.

The following questions present themselves:

1. Do you approve of the name AA Family Group? If not, what do you suggest?
2. Should we adopt the 12 Steps as written for AA, without change or embellishment?

As this is a clearinghouse, let's have your ideas and suggestions.

Please send them to Post Office Box 1475, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, NY.

Very sincerely,
Lois W., Chairman
Anne B., Secretary

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., (1979). *Lois Remembers*. New York

Appendix D

Twelve Steps of Al-Anon

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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Appendix E

Understanding Alcoholism

What Is Alcoholism?

The American Medical Association recognizes alcoholism as a disease that can be arrested but not cured. One of the symptoms is an uncontrollable desire to drink. Alcoholism is a progressive disease. As long as alcoholics continue to drink, their drive to drink will get worse. If not dealt with, the disease can result in insanity or death. The only method of arresting alcoholism is total abstinence.

Most authorities agree that even after years of sobriety, alcoholics can never drink again, because alcoholism is a lifetime disease. There are many successful treatments for alcoholism today. Alcoholics Anonymous is the best known, and widely regarded as the most effective. Alcoholism is no longer a hopeless condition, if it is recognized and treated.

Who Are Alcoholics?

All kinds of people are alcoholics—people from all walks of life. Only a small percentage of alcoholics fit the stereotype of “derelict” or “bum” panhandling on the street. Most alcoholics appear to be functioning fairly well, but their drinking affects some part of their lives. Their family life, their social life, or their work may suffer. It might be all three. Alcoholics are people whose drinking causes a continuing and growing problem in any area of their lives.

Why Do Alcoholics Drink?

Alcoholics drink because they think they have to. They use alcohol as a crutch and an escape. They are in emotional pain and use alcohol to kill that pain. Eventually they depend on alcohol so much that they become convinced they can't live without it. This is obsession. When some alcoholics try to do without alcohol, the withdrawal symptoms are so overwhelming that they go back to drinking because drinking seems to be the only way to get rid of the agony. This is addiction.

Most alcoholics would like to be social drinkers. They spend a lot of time and effort trying to control their drinking so they will be able to drink like other people. They may try drinking on weekends or drinking only a certain drink. But they can never be sure of being able to stop drinking when they want. They end up getting drunk even when they promised themselves they wouldn't. This is compulsion.

It is the nature of this disease that alcoholics do not believe they are ill. This is denial. Hope for recovery lies in their ability to recognize a need for help, their desire to stop drinking, and their willingness to admit that they cannot cope with the problem by themselves.

Understanding Ourselves

Families and Friends Are Affected Alcoholism is a family disease. Compulsive drinking affects the drinker and it affects the drinker's relationships. Friendships, employment, childhood, parenthood, love affairs, and marriages all suffer from the effects of alcoholism. Those special relationships in which a

person is really close to an alcoholic are affected most, and we who care are the most caught up in the behavior of another person. We react to an alcoholic's behavior. Seeing that the drinking is out of hand, we try to control it. We are ashamed of the public scenes but try to handle it in private. It isn't long before we feel we are to blame and take on the hurts, the fears, and the guilt of an alcoholic. We, too, can become ill.

Even well-meaning people often begin to count the number of drinks another person is having. We may pour expensive liquor down drains, search the house for hidden bottles, or listen for the sound of opening cans. All our thinking becomes directed at what the alcoholic is doing or not doing and how to get the drinker to stop drinking. This is our obsession.

Watching fellow human beings slowly kill themselves with alcohol is painful. While alcoholics don't seem to worry about the bills, the job, the children, or the condition of their health, the people around them usually begin to worry. We often make the mistake of covering up. We try to fix everything, make excuses, tell little lies to mend damaged relationships, and worry some more. This is our anxiety.

Sooner or later the alcoholic's behavior makes other people angry. As we realize that the alcoholic is telling lies, using us, and not taking care of responsibilities, we may begin to feel that the alcoholic doesn't love us. We often want to strike back, punish, and make the alcoholic pay for the hurt and frustration caused by uncontrolled drinking. This is our anger.

Sometimes those who are close to the alcoholic begin to pretend. We accept promises and trust the alcoholic. Each time there is a sober period, however brief, we want to believe the problem has gone away forever. When good sense tells us there is something wrong with the alcoholic's drinking and thinking, we still hide how we feel and what we know. This is our denial.

Perhaps the most severe damage to those of us who have shared some part of life with an alcoholic comes in the form of the nagging belief that we are somehow at fault. We may feel it was something we did or did not do—that we were not good enough, not attractive enough, or not clever enough to have solved this problem for the one we love. These are our feelings of guilt.

Help and Hope

We who have turned to AIAAnon have often done so in despair, unable to believe in the possibility of change and unable to go on as we have before. We feel cheated out of a loving companion, overburdened with responsibilities, unwanted, unloved, and alone. There are even those of us who are arrogant, smug, self-righteous, and dominating. We come to AIAAnon, however, because we want and need help. While we may have been driven to AIAAnon by the effects of someone else's drinking, we soon come to know that our own thinking has to change before we can make a new and successful approach to living. It is in AIAAnon that we learn to deal with our obsession, our anxiety, our anger, our denial, and our feelings of guilt. It is through the fellowship that we ease our emotional burdens by sharing our experience, strength, and hope with others. Little by little, we come to realize at our meetings that much of our discomfort comes from our attitudes. We begin to change these attitudes and learn about our responsibilities to ourselves. We discover feelings of self-worth and love, and we grow spiritually. The emphasis begins to be lifted from the alcoholic and placed where we do have some power—over our own lives.

Appendix F

Participant Survey

Q. Age: What is your age?

- 24 years or younger
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65-74 years old
- 75 years or older

Q. Ethnicity origin (or Race): Please specify your ethnicity.

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other

Q. Gender: What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

Q. Location: Enter Zip code

Q. Meeting attendance: How many meetings do you regularly attend?

- A few times a year
- A few times a month
- 1 time a week
- 2 times a week
- 3 times a week
- 4 or more times a week

Q. Program length: How long have you been a member of Al-Anon?

- Less than one year
- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15-19 years
- 20-24 years

25-29 years
30-34 years
35-39 years
40 years or more

Q. Sponsee: How long have you had a sponsor?

Less than one year
1-4 years
5-9 years
10-14 years
15-19 years
20-24 years
25-29 years
30-34 years
35-39 years
40 years or more

Q. Sponsees: How many sponsees do you have?

0 sponsees
1-2 sponsees
3-4 sponsees
5-6 sponsees
7 or more sponsees

Q. Sponsor: How long have you been a sponsor?

1-4 years
5-9 years
10-14 years
15-19 years
20-24 years
25-29 years
30-34 years
35-39 years
40 years or more

Appendix G

Collaboration With Researchers

Policy

Al-Anon cooperates with researchers who are studying the effects of alcoholism as a family disease. Under no circumstances will Al-Anon's Tradition of anonymity be compromised. Outside researchers will not have direct access to Al-Anon's membership information, databases, or mailing lists. Al-Anon will present to members the opportunity to cooperate with researchers, which will be entirely voluntary, at the individual member's discretion. Researchers will never directly solicit members of Al-Anon, either as individuals or members of an Al-Anon group or service arm. While Al-Anon can cooperate with researchers, Al-Anon can never endorse or affiliate with an outside enterprise, or appear to be doing so.

Procedures

The WSO's Information Analyst will act as Al-Anon's liaison with researchers. When researchers request Al-Anon cooperation, the Information Analyst will provide background and explain Al-Anon's approval process. If the researcher decides to request Al-Anon participation in the project, the Information Analyst and other staff will evaluate whether the request is appropriate for further consideration.

If the request is deemed appropriate, it will be forwarded to a work group of two staff and two volunteers, appointed by the Policy Chair. This work group will evaluate whether cooperation with the research project would benefit Al-Anon: scientific studies that document the effectiveness of Al-Anon as a recovery program could increase the credibility and perceived relevance of Al-Anon to a wider cross-section of people in need.

After approval by the work group, the staff will negotiate an agreement with the researcher to define boundaries and determine the scope of Al-Anon's participation in the project.

While Al-Anon respects the independence of the outside researcher, Al-Anon expects researchers to check with Al-Anon on the accuracy about any statement made about the program in general, to request copyright permissions when appropriate, and to share in advance of publication the results of the study. Al-Anon will respect embargo limitations prior to publication and copyright restrictions after publication.

In exchange for participation in the project, Al-Anon expects to cooperate with the researcher to make the results of the study widely available to Al-Anon members and potential members.

Appendix H

Informed Consent

Name of Principle Investigator: Heidi Hiatt

Name of Organization: Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program

Name of Project: Sponsorship in Al-Anon: A Narrative Study

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Introduction

I am Heidi Hiatt a PhD candidate for Leadership and Change at Antioch University. As part of this degree, I am completing a project to explore and understand the sponsorship relationship in Al-Anon. I am going to give you information about the study and invite you to be part of this research. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the research, and take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You may ask questions at any time.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this project is to gain knowledge about the relationship between sponsor and sponsee in Al-Anon. The stories that will be gathered will be used to bring new understanding to the relationship. This information may be useful to therapists and counselors that work with families affected by alcoholism.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in an interview with me in person or via the phone or Skype, where you will answer questions about your experience being a sponsor and a sponsee. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Participants and any names they mention throughout the interview (such as sponsor or sponsees) will be changed to a pseudonym. Each of these interviews will be digitally recorded solely for research purposes, but all of the participants' contributions will be de-identified prior to publication or the sharing of the research results. These recordings, and any other information that may connect you to the study, will be kept in a locked, secure location.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you have been a member of AL-Anon for more than ten years, you have worked with a sponsor for at least eight of those years, and you have worked with a sponsee for at least one year.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. You will not be penalized for your decision not to participate or for anything of your contributions during the

study. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If an interview has already taken place, the information you provided will not be used in the research study.

Risks

No study is completely risk free. However, I do not anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed during this study. You do not have to answer any interview question that makes you feel uncomfortable and you may choose to decline participation during an interview without providing any reason. I will do all I am able to make this a comfortable experience for you.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you other than increased personal awareness and reflection. Your participation may help others learn about Al-Anon and sponsorship.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any monetary incentive to take part in this research project.

Confidentiality

All information will be de-identified, so that it cannot be connected back to you. Your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the write-up of this project, and only the primary researcher will have access to the list connecting your name to the pseudonym. This list, along with tape recordings of the discussion sessions, will be kept in a secure, locked location.

Limits of Privacy Confidentiality

Generally speaking, I can assure you that I will keep everything you tell me or do for the study private. Yet there are times where I cannot keep things private (confidential). The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

- The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
- The researcher finds out that that a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide,
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else,

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person is at risk for self-harm or are self-harming, harming another or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to self-harm or harm another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

Future Publication

The primary researcher, Heidi Hiatt reserves the right to include any results of this study in future scholarly presentations and/or publications. All information will be de-identified prior to publication.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without your job being affected.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact Heidi Hiatt, hhiatt@antioch.edu

If you have any ethical concerns about this study, contact Lisa Kreeger, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change, Email: lkreeger@antioch.edu.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Antioch International Review Board (IRB), which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger.

DO YOU WISH TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIOTAPED IN THIS STUDY?

I voluntarily agree to let the researcher audiotape me for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

To be filled out by the researcher or the person taking consent:

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent _____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

Appendix I

Twelve Traditions - Al-Anon

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants—they do not govern.
3. The relatives of alcoholics, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves an Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend.
4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting another group or Al-Anon or AA as a whole.
5. Each Al-Anon Family Group has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of AA *ourselves*, by encouraging and understanding our alcoholic relatives, and by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics.
6. Our Family Groups ought never endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim. Although a separate entity, we should always co-operate with Alcoholics Anonymous.
7. Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Al-Anon Twelfth Step work should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. Our groups, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. The Al-Anon Family Groups have no opinion on outside issues; hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and TV. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all AA members.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.

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Appendix J Permissions

Permission to use Alcoholics Anonymous' Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

Dear Heidi,

Thank you for your email in which you requested permission to reprint the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon in your dissertation entitled *It is Sponsorship in Al-Anon Family Groups: A Narrative Study*.

A.A. has no objection to your reprinting Al-Anon's or its Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, in all methods of delivery, and we would ask you to use the following disclaimer in connection with your reprinting of the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions:

The Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions Alcoholics Anonymous and the Al-Anon Family Groups are reprinted with permission of A.A. World Services, Inc. ("A.A.W.S.") Permission to reprint these Steps and Traditions does not mean that A.A.W.S. has reviewed or approved the contents of this dissertation, or that A.A. necessarily agrees with the views expressed herein. Please note, A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism only - use of the Steps and Traditions in connection with programs and activities which are patterned after A.A., but which address other problems, or in any other non-A.A., does not imply otherwise.

If, at some point you elect to translate the Steps and Traditions into a particular language, we would ask that you notify us of your intent, in writing, and that you use the existing A.A. translation of the Steps and Traditions in that language as a guide in creating your own translation.

If you are in agreement with the above, please respond at your earliest convenience by replying to this email. Thank you in advance for your anticipated cooperation.

Sincerely,

Darlene

Darlene Smith

Intellectual Property Administrator

A.A. World Services, Inc.

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New York, NY 10115

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Permission to use Al-Anon's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

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Please attach copy of the material you wish to reprint and a copy of excerpted material as it is to appear on your printed page including at least the two paragraphs that immediately precede and two paragraphs that immediately follow the quoted material. Please use highlighter to clearly identify the excerpted material.

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Title Sponsorship in Al-Anon Family Groups: A Narrative Study

by Heidi Hiatt

To be published by Antioch University Not later than 12/2017
(month/year)

And will appear on pages numbered 181 and 191-192

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Signature of applicant Signed Heidi Hiatt

Print applicant's name Heidi Hiatt

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By Signed Tom Coffey Date 7/11/17

PLEASE ALLOW A MINIMUM OF 3 WEEKS TO PROCESS.

Permission to use GeoBatch Map

On Jul 6, 2017, at 8:46 PM, BatchGeo Support <admin@batchgeo.com> wrote:

Hi Heidi,

Yes, you can use the map.

Please let me know if you have further questions.

Thank you,
Tracy

On Jul 06, 2017 at 09:40PM PDT Heidi Hiatt <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Dear Tracy,

I am a doctoral student at Antioch University, writing a dissertation entitled "Sponsorship in Al-Anon Family Groups: A Narrative Study". Thank you for agreeing earlier to allow me to use your map for my dissertation. In order to do so, I need formal permission.

I am requesting permission to use the map I created on BatchGeo found at the following link: <https://batchgeo.com/map/248b7eeb8666465f6e1912a84223e22b>

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If you agree to this, please give me your permission via reply email.

Thank you very much, Tracy. I appreciate all your help.

Sincerely,

Heidi Hiatt

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